

# **Literature Education as a social metaphor**

by  
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates Literature Education as one cultural representation of societies. The use of literature is seen as essential to the process of educating social subjects. It is a subject founded on an interdisciplinary *triangle* composed of an asymmetrical combination of language studies, cultural studies and social studies. Each change of the apex of the triangle indicates a shifted emphasis on certain socio-cultural and politico-pedagogical characteristics. As a border-crossing discipline, literature education can have a central role in the creation of a socio-political conscience in the future citizens of a particular society.

In the thesis two paradigms of literature education have been viewed, described and analysed. The first, the English paradigm, attempts to inculcate in students a range of 'high-culture' values, without offering a clear methodology for the teaching of literature. It has relatively blurred objectives and theories, and aims at fostering *personal responses* to the literary text. The other, the Brazilian, is a positivist paradigm centred on literary history. It privileges a pseudo-scientific objectivity. In spite of the conceptual differences between a systematised, descriptive model on the one hand, requiring the mastery of large quantities of content, and another, aiming at building up cultural and literary subjectivity, the thesis suggests similarities between them in terms of certain pedagogic practices, views of students, and of the final product aimed for.

This dissertation analyses and describes the cultural significance of the curricular contents and pedagogic practices of literature education in the final years of secondary school, through the data of classroom practices collected both in England and in Brazil. In aiming to understand literature education as a social metaphor it concludes by making some recommendations on modes of teaching and learning which may be essential in creating greater access to cultural goods and thereby more equitable societies.



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## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER: Raising the Issues

In this chapter I will be discussing the meanings of literature, education, and literature education, having as central argument the role of literature as a socio-cultural object of study, its relation to pedagogy, and its implications in school use.

According to Riessman, 'the construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it'.<sup>1</sup> Talk is inherent to my object of study, as I place myself as an insider-narrator, as a story-teller, while at the same time being the outsider, the one who questions and struggles to analyse, categorise, interpret my own narrative and that of others in literature education situations. This dual task, as informer and organiser, as giver and taker, requires metaphorical internal and external eyes to narrate and examine living realities around literature, education, societies.

The thesis is an attempt to answer three questions, which are the origin of this study:

*what are the purposes of teaching and studying literature?*

*what is the present social role of literature education in schools?*

*how can we empower social subjects in literature classrooms?*

The academic profile of literature education, both in Brazil and in England, points to an interdisciplinary intersection, in which the pedagogical aspect, literary criticism and philosophic-historical foundation predominate in both the theoretical and the pragmatic approaches to the discipline. Whereas in Brazil there seems to be a prevalence of historico-biographical theory over literary-pedagogical questions, the English academic approach apparently privileges the pragmatic aspect, often in a radical manner, seeking authenticity of response. There is a great deal of talk about the daily construction of practical theory in literature classrooms, in which the lack of epistemological reflection seems to compromise the production of coherent and profound knowledge.

The two dominant paradigms found in the teaching of literature in State schools in Brazil and in England point in different directions, carrying with them their specific ideologies, values, methods, critiques and evaluation systems as well

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine K. Riessman (1993) *Narrative Analysis*, p. v

as schemes of knowledge. Each will be described and analysed in subsequent chapters. In principle, I believe neither model is entirely satisfactory for my political-pedagogical project, as they serve the construction of social subjectivity adequate for each system. But each has built-in values which I find worth examining, and consider crucial to the literary-pedagogical critique I propose to define in this thesis. I have a point of view, and in this study I attempt to examine the network of relationships that have influenced my ideas, around the learning and teaching of literature.

As a 'professional of Letters' since the early 1970s, I have experienced literature education as a study founded upon biographical-historical bases both as teacher and taught; it is still the prevalent model in Brazilian secondary schools. The modernisation of literature education has been influenced by communication theories, but there seems to be limited interference of recently constructed literary theories in school application.

As in many other countries, both in Brazil and in the United Kingdom literature is one of the subjects studied at secondary school level. It is an official discipline of studies, with prescribed aims, contents, forms of assessment and expected outcome. Other subjects, specially in the social sciences/humanities field, encompass a series of parallel features and overlapping elements. But, it seems, none as vast, varied and undetermined as literature. While, for example, history, philosophy, sociology departments produce history, philosophy and sociology, literature departments usually produce criticism and scholarship, not literature.<sup>2</sup> The first reason why it is a complex subject of studies is the fact that literature deals with one of the most powerful forms of culture and human artistic expression, which is the *word*. 'Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation'<sup>3</sup>. While it relates to the senses, emotions, and reason, both to individuals and to social groups, literature concerns the communication of ideas, feelings, emotions and thoughts. Also, literature is situated closely allied to social studies, in which case it is dealt with in association with historical and/or cultural data, as in Brazil, in order to better explain written manifestations of art throughout times (although 'no substitute for sociology or

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<sup>2</sup> According to Bernard Bergonzi (1990) *Exploding English: criticism, theory, culture*, pp 168-9

<sup>3</sup> Rene Wellek & Austin Warren (1973) *Theory of Literature*, Chapter Nine, p. 94

politics. It has its own justification and aim.’<sup>4</sup>). I see the triangle art/ social-cultural studies/ language as a movable figure, with a varying apex, depending on the pedagogical orientation of a given moment (time and space) in any education system. Whereas in Brazil the triangle rests on its socio-cultural side, following positivist methods, in England, at the level viewed, it seems to rest - explicitly - on its aesthetic element, although relying on implicit socio-cultural elements.

The literary appeal mentioned above reaches readers either chronologically, as they enter the literary world, or in ‘waves’ of depth, which change from reading to reading. For instance, a child’s first contact with literature happens through a sensorial encounter, mainly visual or audio-visual, when reading, being read to, or simply attracted by the illustrations. Recently, a more sophisticated level has been achieved by industries with children-as-consumers targets: other ‘reading’ material can be found which involves touch and smell, aiding in the (active) internal production of the new sign for the reader<sup>5</sup>.

Some of the studies carried out regarding the kinds of reading attained by adults have reached conclusions which point to the fact that the senses are primarily awakened to each new reading experience<sup>6</sup>. Those studies show how visual descriptions, imagined smells, sounds, sensory sensations come first, followed by positive or negative feelings towards descriptive elements or the narrative expression itself. The deeper level involves reasoning, either on the text, or the author’s resources, or even on the contextual elements surrounding the text<sup>7</sup>. The three levels - sensory, emotional, rational - can happen in different readings, or all at once, depending on the reader’s experience. And the reader’s sensorial, emotional and rational contribution will establish an interactive channel between author-text-reader and also between readers. This seems to constitute crucial data for understanding the acquisition of deeper reading skills, a contribution to the generative process of critical awareness of literature as artistic

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<sup>4</sup> Wellek & Warren (1973), op cit., Chapter Nine, p. 109

<sup>5</sup> To use Peirce’s terminology. Apud Kress (1995) *Writing the Future: English and the Making of a Culture of Innovation*, NATE, p. 115

<sup>6</sup> Robert Protherough (1986), *Teaching Literature for Examinations*, p. 126: ‘As early as the 1920s June Downey pointed out a number of ways in which the reading of poetry seemed to be conditioned by the personalities of the readers, some basically ‘realising’ poems in visual and tactile terms and others emphasising the ‘hearing’ or the ‘music’ of the words, varying in the intensity with which they responded to emotion in the poems or in the attention they paid to qualities of form and structure.’

<sup>7</sup> As narrated by M. Helena Martins in *O Que é Leitura?*, Ed. Brasiliense, São Paulo.

and socio-cultural expression. Educators should raise the question as to whether the school agenda acknowledges and employs this knowledge.

When literature becomes a school subject it suffers historical and social variations and is practised in different forms and paradigms. For instance, it is an independent, compulsory subject in the Brazilian system, whereas in England it is presented as a chosen subject for the exams, often as a 'functional load' which imbricates literature, language and composition. In each case, the pedagogical focus is redirected in order to compose the educational agenda, with all of its ideological, socio-economic, political and historico-cultural implications. The educational profile of literature at school requires, above individual and social interaction by readers, the achievement of more measurable results. As a consequence, the written work of art is *consumed* at school for productive aims, and very little emphasis is put on literature at school as a ground for developing artistic sensibility and for producing writers; so far the mainly accepted aims towards democratic aims have been utilitarian, teaching either language skills and communication, or moral and heritage values<sup>8</sup>. However, democracy means more than choice about consumption practices<sup>9</sup>; contents, objectives and methods are closely connected with socio-economic requirements in democratic systems which overtly cater for all, but which impose boundaries to the potentialities in literary literacy.

Decades ago, R. Wellek and A. Warren had already pointed to the distinction between literature and literature study, two distinct activities, in the following terms: 'one is creative, an art; the other, if not precisely a science, is a species of knowledge or of learning'. Thus, the literature student has the task to 'translate his experience of literature into intellectual terms, assimilate it to a coherent scheme which must be rational if it is to be knowledge'.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Defining Literature Education***

In this introductory chapter, I would like to discuss some of the assumptions commonly connected with the process of teaching and learning literature. In order to justify my position before the role of literature at school, I

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<sup>8</sup> Louise Rosenblatt (1970) *Literature as Exploration*, p v

<sup>9</sup> Michael Apple (1985) *Education and Power*, Ark Editions, p. ix

<sup>10</sup> Rene Wellek & Austin Warren (1973) *Theory of Literature*. London, Penguin Books, p 15

have opted to use the phrase literature education. As a subject of studies, literature is part of an educational agenda laden with ideological compromises and politico-cultural roles and expectations. The paradigm students deal with is basically founded on pedagogical literature, the purpose of which is strictly didactic, rather than aesthetic or socio-cultural, and which, despite its theoretical indeterminacy, has a clear profile for examinations and expected results, in both countries. It so happens that, at school, pedagogy takes precedence over literature, and the triangle's apex changes according to the dominant ideology—politically and socio-economically - and sometimes the emphasis is on language usage, at other times on artistic expression, or on a neutralised communication of socio-cultural issues.

Several ampler issues co-exist within the intersecting character of literature education. What does its study lead to—to the building up of a better person, according to F.R. Leavis'? To the pure and simple knowledge of texts leading to the domain of written language, in the philological line of thought prevalent in Oxford till the mid-twentieth century? To another view of historical, political and social facts, local and universal, under the inspiration of Marxist New Left? 'Literary attitudes' have been described as a way 'to promote the style, in deportment, speech, and dress, of the academic elite.'<sup>11</sup> Surely literature has served the purpose of imposing on students the hegemonic socio-economic ideologies, despite the static and aseptic 'upper-middle-class patina' painted by academic literature, turning the subject into 'an adornment, an isolable unit that confirms the sterility of life under capitalism'<sup>12</sup>.

Both in Brazil (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação*) and in England (The National Curriculum), educational policies have been put under scrutiny in an attempt to consider society's current necessities and maladies. The final outcome, however, achieves a minimal subversion of society's status quo, and, in some realms, there have been serious considerations about the role of literature in the school syllabuses, and its possible elimination<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen Cantarow, 'Why teach literature?', in Kampf & Lauter (eds.) (1973) The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English, p 91

<sup>12</sup> Cantarow, op cit., ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In 'Why Literature Matters' (in *English Journal* v. 93, n.8, Dec. 1994, NCTE, USA), Tim Gillespie describes the pragmatists' argument: [...] 'No one *needs* literature to be a productive worker, competitive in the global economy.(...) The important reading matter of the future will be *information*, and the main reading skills *information-gathering* and *information-processing*. (...)

So, what is literature to be studied for in each country? In other words, what are its aims as prescribed by policies and practised by schools? Should students be taught to enjoy reading literature, or perhaps to engage in literary criticism or in descriptive bio-historical studies? One of the issues for general discussion is whether literature at school should focus upon the entertainment element, running the risk of becoming self-explanatory, an end in itself, a leisure-time activity for a few; or, on the other hand, should it be dealt with as an instrument to help the development of *social subjects*, in their individual self-growth and in their active political participation and awareness. If the literary work of art becomes an instrument, then does literature lose its artistic component? Rosenblatt states that more 'social science' can be learned from literature than from social science itself, although literature must be approached not as social documentation, but as art.<sup>14</sup> If literature is to be studied in order to develop individuals' artistic sensibility, how influential is its transformative element? If this philosophical, ethical problem is found insoluble, it is crucial to determine which aspect should be prioritised at school, as well as which values are established in school-based literary studies. This requires the definition of the role of literature in the construction of personal-social subjectivities at school and in society, as well as eliciting the contribution literature education can offer to the current multiracial, ever-changing society we have in Brazil, in England, and many other countries. Should literature remain as a subject of studies at all?<sup>15</sup>

The literature student at school has been thought of as an embryonic writer, as an activist, as someone curious about language facts, or even as a formative being in search of value orientation. Yet, how does he/she manifest him/herself, what influences lie behind these interests, what answers does he/she offer? It is equally important to know who the literature teacher is, a writer, a scholar, a critic,

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[W]ho really *needs* to know about Shakespeare these days? This is an enthusiasm, a leisure-time pursuit, but not a necessary skill for the twenty-first century.' (p. 16)

<sup>14</sup> Louise Rosenblatt (1970), *op cit.*, p vi (Foreword)

<sup>15</sup> Michael Bancroft questions the teaching of literature as presently found, over the knowledge of genres, authors, literary history, elements of poetry and fiction, and the rudimentary tools of criticism, in the face of so many general learning difficulties most students present. He sees the *absence of a coherent theory of literature* as the main problem. Also my own dilemma, I acknowledge Bancroft's request that *literary and pedagogical theorists* [should] *paint a clearer picture of the pedagogical implications of their ideas*. In 'Why Literature in the High School Curriculum', *English Journal* v. 83, n.8, Dec. 1994, NCTE, USA - pp 23-4. See also Tim Gillespie's above mentioned article, whose central question is 'Who really, in this modern world of commerce, needs literature of *any* kind?'



a revolutionary, renovator or reactionary pedagogue, and how she/he was taught and trained to exercise her/his function. It is crucial to hear their voices, to analyse and interpret them. It seems equally crucial to question what the literature classroom situation is in relation to the school and to the curriculum, how it interacts internally and externally with educational policies and society in general, what its objectives are in relation to students.

Readers are generally believed to gain knowledge and understanding from works of literature: this is often offered as one of the reasons why reading literary texts is an important part of one's education, as if a clearer perception of certain 'realities' would emerge through the literary experience.<sup>16</sup> The nineteenth-century example of John Stuart Mill's remedial experience with Wordsworth's poetry, which helped him overcome a major crisis in his life, supports the case for those who look for therapeutic support in literature<sup>17</sup>.

School mediates the encounter between children and literature in a very different fashion from that between an adolescent and the literary text. At adolescence level, the school literary experience seems to lean towards 'learning', and away from recreation and creativity, with an emphasis on the more formal and less challenging aspects of education rather than on literature as a creative subject. At school, students are gradually led towards the completion of literature-related tasks, be they essay-writing in English classrooms, or comprehension checks in Brazilian ones. These reflections illustrate, at best, a pedagogical concern for literary consumption in a quantitative measure. In terms of production, students' *good* written texts are praised for their language accuracy, rather than for the informative content or artistic quality of their work, and are set as an example for other students. But do students, anyway, have anything to say that really matters? Are they not *tabulae rasae* of knowledge and experience? Perhaps there lies the

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<sup>16</sup> Gribble (1983), op cit., p 12

<sup>17</sup> *What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind, was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings; which had no connexion (sic) with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt at once better and happier as I came under their influence.*

(F.A.Cavenagh (ed.) *James and John Stuart Mill on Education*. 'J.S. Mill's Autobiography', p. 130)

case with students' literary production; they can write about texts, but they cannot be expected to write their own texts, let alone become *authors*; their texts are rarely considered a valid interchange of cultural experiences, or of significant reflection. This was observed in literature classrooms at sixth-form level in England, when most of what teachers explained to students was already known by them, and significant gaps were left unquestioned and therefore unexplained, because students were passively silent, and their real questions not voiced.

This study does not intend to argue for a whole generation of literature writers to be bred at school. Textual production of various kinds, however, can relate to the understanding of individual participation in broader public, political decisions; to the development of the senses, emotions and reason in the hearing of our own voice in the universe, or to quote Paulo Freire, the reading of 'the word and the world', provided that educational agendas allow literature such role.

This leads to another of the issues I intend to question here. Kress<sup>18</sup> has written about the role of a curriculum in the construction of social subjectivity, looking at the possibility of better futures; White<sup>19</sup> has shown concern about the role of the curriculum in the well-being of pupils. I think both authors, from their semiotic and philosophical standpoints, question problems such as who the student is, what she/he is being exposed to, what values she/he is being taught, what her/his chances are to contribute to their generation's society, and also how independent, creative, critical and participating she/he is learning to be through the formative education received at school. The contribution literature can make in the proposal of a better curriculum is my specific interest, as well as its role in the construction of relevant knowledge for social subjects, participant individuals in a value-laden society. The whole curriculum, along with the entire regime and official culture of the school and their reading of 'culture', 'politics' and 'literature' with ingrained accents of possession, separation and exclusion, silently and objectively institutionalises the dominant order<sup>20</sup>. To understand the political and

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<sup>18</sup> Gunther Kress, 'An English Curriculum for the Future' in *Changing English* vol. 1, n.2, Institute of Education, London 1994

<sup>19</sup> John White, *Education and the Good Life: Beyond the National Curriculum*, Kogan Page & Institute of Education, London 1990

<sup>20</sup> Janet Batsleer et al (1985), *Reading English: cultural politics of gender and class*, p 10-11, 21 develop this point further.

ideological implications and values behind and around the apparently neutral<sup>21</sup> discourse of curricular prescriptions, it seems necessary to determine the cultural scene in which they occur. That is why literature education, as presently found in schools, appears sometimes to be more deeply marked by pedagogical than by curricular literary elements, although both are expressive of social organisation, values, and therefore, metaphorical.

One of the reasons given by Rosenblatt for literature to be studied at school is the fact that 'literature fosters the kind of imagination needed in a democracy - the ability to participate in the needs and aspirations of other personalities and to envision the effect of our actions on their lives'<sup>22</sup>; therefore, learning can also be the perception of wider implications and their relation to the central core of human values. Tim Gillespie writes that one of literature's potential benefits is to enlarge a reader's sense about the many possible ways of living, pointing out the economic implications of the contribution literature can make to the traditional national ethos, while believing that '[l]iterature does not teach morals in a didactic way; rather, it gives us a chance to *experience* moral dilemmas.'<sup>23</sup>

### ***The concept of school education***

Education is an activity in and of society and is related to every possible aspect of changing social structures, relationships and ideals<sup>24</sup>; even war losses have been explained in terms of educational aims and achievements.<sup>25</sup> Stephen Ball writes about the importance of taking account of the peculiar *content* of policy-making and decision-making in the school, as education goals are ambiguous and unclearly stated<sup>26</sup>. School ideology comprises not only a set of beliefs and ideas officially determined, but also those previously experienced by the teachers while

<sup>21</sup> In *Education and Power*, Michael Apple analyses the neutrality and method-centred orientation of educational curricula which wither the fact that education is a political enterprise, p. 12

<sup>22</sup> Rosenblatt, Louise (1970). *Literature as Exploration*, pp. 222, 272

<sup>23</sup> Gillespie (1994) op cit., pp. 17-18

<sup>24</sup> As defined by John Lawson & Harold Silver (1973) *A Social History of Education in England*, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> As Lloyd George did in 1918: *The most formidable institution we had to fight in Germany was not the arsenals of Krupps or the yards in which they turned out submarines, but the schools of Germany. They were our most formidable competitors in business and our most terrible opponents in war. An educated man is a better worker, a more formidable warrior, and a better citizen. That was only half comprehended before the war.* Apud Mathieson, M. In 'The Newbolt report and English for the English', p. 181, in *Exploring literature in schools*, (1987) ed. Victor J. Lee.

<sup>26</sup> In *The Micro-Politics of the School* (1987), Methuen, London, p. 13

in the role of students themselves. As an organisation, the school design is a question of values: teaching must match examinations, since 'organisations need to specialise their tasks but then need to bond them together', mirroring the increased pressure to deliver what they are expected to deliver<sup>27</sup>.

The school experience has been described as the training ground for punctuality, quiet, orderly group work, obedience to orders, bells, timetables, respect for authority, tolerance of monotony, boredom, punishment, lack of reward, and regular attendance at a place of work<sup>28</sup>. There is a role for literature in such context, and political conditions constrain particular narratives. Thus, I question the possibility of expecting literature education to illuminate democratic objectives in a school system marked by an authoritarian mode. When Clive Harber describes schools as follows:

[s]chools not only tend to be authoritarian but also tend to be ethnocentric and racist, predominantly competitive, sexist and socially divisive. Teachers themselves consistently favoured the centre-right in electoral terms rather than the centre-left in general elections right through the 1970s and 1980s<sup>29</sup>

he may be solely identifying socialisation in school with what happens in the social world outside the school. Although school routines and behavioural norms constitute an important aspect of socialisation, in literature education it is the curriculum of textbooks, teacher talk, and lesson plans that play an equally crucial role as influences on students. As Bowers points out, school socialisation also involves students acquiring a functional knowledge of cultural norms important for their successful performance at school. Talking, listening, and reading are the most pervasive activities in school, at a high level of symbolic cultural knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

Apple, among others, argues that 'the educational and cultural system is an exceptionally important element in the maintenance of existing relations of domination and exploitation in these societies'. However, instead of 'passive internalizers of pre-given social messages'<sup>31</sup>, students actually contribute with their personal outlooks to the complexity of the classroom transaction. The main blank to be filled in literature classes, therefore, seems to be the discovery of possibilities through the exercise of critical capacities in literature reading. On attempting to

<sup>27</sup> Handy & Atkin, *Understanding Schools as Organisations* (1986), Penguin Books - p 27.

<sup>28</sup> In *Education and Modernisation* (1971), Faber, London, pp. 54-55

<sup>29</sup> Clive Harber (1992) *Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy*, pp. 12-13

<sup>30</sup> C.A. Bowers (1984) *The Promise of Theory: Education and the Politics...*, pp 50- 53

<sup>31</sup> Michael Apple, op cit., p. 10 -14

remove politics from the semiotic domain of signs, images and meanings, school practices, among other forms of social interaction, segregate this domain from the lives and interests of *ordinary people*, who are then induced to accept their self-image as incapable of, and bored by, political reflection and action.<sup>32</sup>

The cultural element at school plays an essential role in students' social interaction, 'regenerating a specific lived culture'<sup>33</sup>, the group's own agenda, which is not possibly appropriated or acknowledged by the school. In the specific case of Brazilian State secondary schools and English sixth form, there were other cultural features than the ones described by Apple in working-class American schools; in spite of contextual differences between South-American and European struggling polities and economies, all the groups observed had academic interests and generally aimed at entering university, in spite of viewing themselves as social outcasts: in England, non-compulsory literature students were mostly female, non-white, working-class, while in Brazil, where literature is compulsory for the university entrance exams, most students seen at State secondary schools came from low-income homes. In both countries the students observed struggled for better futures. They seemed to work hard and place their hopes of social ascension on the future acquisition of a degree.

This points to the political implications of individualism and the liberal discourse which promises freedom and autonomy to choose and ascend socio-economically. In practice, things happen in a set frame of considerable immutability, and the state (as agent) seems out of reach of students' immediate reactions and demands. In this setting, I wish to focus on the analysis of the role, methods and theories found in literature classrooms, while also trying to propose a critique relevant not only to literature as an artistic expression through language, which can mediate social and cultural encounters, but also to education as a somewhat anachronistic socio-political institution framed in a set of political ideologies which demand classroom struggle between traditional roles and a fast changing world.

Batsleer et al write that reading and writing are forms of regulation and exploitation, besides potential modes of resistance, celebration and solidarity.

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<sup>32</sup> Janet Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., p 7, deal with that point.

<sup>33</sup> Apple, op cit., p. 104

Literature at school exposes the contradiction between things as they are and as they might be, and rather than intellectual or stylistic, this is a political issue. As patriarchal-capitalist institutions, schools aim to regenerate themselves in material foundations and structures, as well as in the hearts and minds of people, 'while never losing sight or despairing of the power of popular organisation and struggle to resist and transform them' (1985, p. 5).

### ***Cultural differences***

The clientele chosen as subjects of this study is basically of working-class origin in both countries; they represent the majority of the population in an exceptional situation, i.e., studying beyond compulsory education age (14 in Brazil, 16 in England). Literary values for working-class pupils are situated in a social and ideological process that is profoundly ambiguous and disorienting in its movement and destination, with literary ideologies exercising an unchallenged monopoly of the means of discursive legitimacy which, consequently, can absorb, transform and neutralise political impulsion. As a concept and a practice, literature education is a particular selection and organisation of texts 'rightly sifted and rightly studied', defined mainly by its position and function in the curricular and pedagogic economy; one of the strengths of literary discourse is its self-presentation as a totalizing explanation, ecumenical, disinterested and classless, according to Batsleer et al (pp. 21-27). How literature education deals with cultural differences among students is another point of concern in both contexts, Brazilian and English. After all, education remains the most powerful of the cultural apparatuses<sup>34</sup>.

Culture has been viewed, among other definitions, as a whole 'way of life' or 'way of struggle', with a consequent shift and expansion of the meaning of politics<sup>35</sup>. Or as 'humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote'<sup>36</sup>, whereas national culture is often regarded as 'a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from worldly affiliations'<sup>37</sup>. Williams

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<sup>34</sup> Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., p 37

<sup>35</sup> Janet Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., p 7

<sup>36</sup> Edward Said (1993), *Culture and Imperialism*, Chapter I, p 15

<sup>37</sup> Said (1993), op cit., p 12

believes that the idea of culture, based on its effort at total qualitative assessment, is 'a general reaction to a general and major change in the conditions of our common life'<sup>38</sup>, whereas Said proposes a self-definition of culture as one having its own rhetoric, set of occasions, and authorities, and a familiarity through which 'the assertion of identity' is not a mere ceremonial matter.<sup>39</sup> The option to focus on the majority of working-class students in both countries intrinsically places this study as a way of struggle, dealing with those excluded and demoted from the mainstream structures of cultural power.

In Chapter One I describe a successful project carried out in three different primary schools in Brazil throughout seven years, based upon alternative pedagogies and using literary texts as an instrument of self-growth<sup>40</sup> and of building up democratic processes in early years of schooling. The utilitarian value attributed to the literary text as part of individual self-recognition and elevation of personal and socio-cultural self-esteem did not intend to deny its artistic character. With an emphasis on orality as autobiographic texts, on the discovery and valuation of each person's social and political role in immediate and wider contexts, the action axis was placed on the literary text, ranging from magic tales to contemporary texts expressing social concern.

However, after students enter higher levels of schooling, the so-called positivist pattern emphasising quantitative cognition in literature studies in Brazil seems to direct the focus of interest to the text's formal features, placing the student-reader on a secondary plan. Not a totally different situation can be found in English literature classrooms, with a naturally wide range of cultural, social and political differences. In order to understand the paradigms found, to examine literature education practices under the light of different ideologies has proved crucial. In the following chapters I will demonstrate the grounding on history, cultural studies, pedagogical philosophies and literary theories which I chose to use as an attempt to propose a critique of literature education so far absent not only from classroom practices but also from most theoretical considerations.

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<sup>38</sup> Raymond Williams (1963) *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*, 'Conclusion', p 285

<sup>39</sup> Said (1993), *op cit.*, p 42

<sup>40</sup> Used here with the politico-pedagogical connotation described by Paulo Freire, Pedro Demo, Dermeval Saviani and other Brazilian educationists, related to the construction of meaningful knowledge in public primary schools.

### ***Methods, Theories and Options***

A study of literature education in two countries offers an almost endless range of questions, points of interest, aims and methods of research, dangerously leading to diverse paths, routes and conclusions. As Said puts it, 'far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more 'foreign' elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude'.<sup>41</sup> In this dissertation I have opted methodologically to adopt a 'foreign' point-of-view. A true foreigner in England, I entered classrooms trying to learn personal-professional *habitus* and institutional ideologies through all the signs my theoretical cultural 'antennae' could apprehend. Similarly, returning to Brazil for fieldwork in March 95, after one and a half years away from home, provided me with an eye of 'strangeness', having acquired a more or less distanced perspective also born from experiencing new educational practices in English classrooms. In fact, my 'foreignness' in Brazil proved extremely valuable, allowing me to *look and see* pedagogical acts in a newly distanced manner, through narrative processes.

Throughout the development of this dissertation it has become clear to me that, considering the metaphorical tripod described above supporting literature education, I have chosen to focus upon the cultural-political element, rather than the linguistic or the purely aesthetic<sup>42</sup> per se. With that in mind, it seemed evident to me that the voices of those directly involved in the pedagogical process - teachers and students - should constitute the central body of information not only for analysis but also for the attempted recommendation of contents and practices.

Theoretical foundation for discussion and deeper insertion into those issues came from different areas of knowledge; for example, I went through a variety of texts about progressive education in England before deciding that that sort of experimentalism had little to do with present issues concerning nationness, democratic knowledge and pedagogies. Paulo Freire, however, has been a permanent source of lucid inspiration and clear insights, even when speaking

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<sup>41</sup> Edward Said (1993) op cit., p 15

<sup>42</sup> Bill Corcoran (1992) 'Reader Stance: From Willed Aesthetic to Discursive Construction', pp. 52-3, in Many and Cox (eds.) summarises Iser's separation of the 'artistic' (the text produced by the writer) and 'aesthetic' (the 'realization' of that text by the reader) poles of literary works; exclusive concentration on either pole will reveal little about what happens in the reading process.



through other writers and educationists<sup>43</sup>. Reading about the philosophic lines usually presented in pedagogical opposition, positivism and liberal-humanism, also offered some valuable insights. Literary theories and theorists of various academic orientations and political lines of thought provided me with invaluable reflections, specially when proposing perfectly logically constructed paradigms which, not yet practised with students, become a clear example of the dichotomy between the academy and the classroom. Equally relevant were the reflections upon cultural issues, the role of literature in the maintenance of imperialist interests, the presence of cultural absences encountered in working-class environments in both countries. Some feminist theories were found equally relevant, in their argument for gender democracy, besides helping me to understand why and how women - the majority found in literature classrooms, both as teachers and as students - are still expected to identify their positions with theoretical signifiers that are fundamentally paternal, as put by Luke & Gore<sup>44</sup>. Throughout those readings I kept thinking about the majority of students interviewed, and the social, economic, political and cultural gaps identified by them, crucial in the definition of proposed democratic literature classrooms. Consequently, the multifarious theoretical framework founding the analysis of empirical evidence and substantiating my findings proved more suitable of description and review imbricated in the text itself, woven together, rather than in isolated literature review chapters. It has not been my intention to analyse literary theories or literary movements, periods or genres in this study.

I have structured the dissertation in three parts. The first explains the *purpose* of the investigation. It comprises Chapters One, the autobiographical account of my personal, academic and professional habitus, in order to allow the reader inside the subjective understanding of the aims, proposals, dilemmas and eventual omissions in a thesis on literature education; Chapter Two, which describes my experience re-entering Brazilian classrooms; and Chapter Three, providing a pedagogical account of literature classrooms in England, using narratives of recent facts, events and reports, complemented by the description of the initiation process of entering English schools. The second part corresponds to

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<sup>43</sup> In this dissertation, besides Paulo Freire's, I have also used Donaldo Macedo's, Henry Giroux's, Denise Boerckel's analyses and applications of Freire's pedagogical concepts and theoretical principles.

<sup>44</sup> Carmen Luke & Jennifer Gore (1992) *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, 'Foreword', p ix

the *methodological* approach, which examines the evidence and analyses how data were produced. I interpret empirical evidence in two chapters, as collected in Brazilian and in English classrooms, by interviewing teachers and students. The third part is the *analysis*, which deals with teachers' and students' voices, experiences, and representations. In it I look into the basic concepts emerging from the research, presented as social metaphors, to close with the conclusions and recommendations. The bulk part of this empirical evidence appears in the voice of the subjects of research: I have tried to let them speak, and my interferences have been dialogically intended.

Throughout the study I have attempted to make a coherent use of the subjective *I* as metaphorical representation of the search for democratic pedagogies in practice and in theory. The use of 'I' in my narrative attempts to define and acknowledge my presence in it, as part of my political commitment to the subject of research, the subjects involved and the aims literature education must pursue, while preparing the reader for 'the inside content'.<sup>45</sup> The tone of the dissertation might be considered post-structural, focusing on signification, on power/knowledge relationships, and on the control of institutional structures and their actors.

On closing the dissertation I hope to have achieved a satisfactory answer to the questions posed by the thesis, towards a *pedagogy of possibility*.

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<sup>45</sup> Beverley Skeggs 'Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour*', in Barker & Beezer (1992) *Reading into Cultural Studies*, p 187. Skeggs refers to McRobbie's (1980) criticism of male subcultural theorists, for their lack of presence in the narrative.

## PART I - Situational Contexts

In part I include three chapters which examine different social contexts in which literature education is practised as a subject for examinations at the end of the schooling system, beyond compulsory education. Its central objective is to allow the reader to understand the social, political, cultural and pedagogical grounds founding the teaching-learning process of literature, before tackling specific empirical evidence and the analysis of the data produced. In chapters One, Two and Three I give an indication of time, place, situation and participants. Chapter One offers a personal account of the origins of my interest in the subject; Two, a more distanced perspective of the literary pedagogical context in Brazil; and Three, an attempt to penetrate and understand the English context for literary studies. They illustrate how literature education poses a symbolic representation of social realities through its modes of teaching, learning and 'de-theorising' the discipline.

In this part I attempt to describe the present role of literature education in the construction of social subjects, through the paradigms of submission or of deviation encountered, while focusing on socio-cultural differences.

In the revolutionary perspective, the learners are invited to think. Being conscious, in this sense, is not simply a formula or a slogan. It is a radical form of being, of being human. It pertains to beings that not only know, but know that they know. The knowledge of earlier knowledge, gained by the learners as a result of analyzing praxis in its social context, opens to them the possibility of new knowledge. The new knowledge, going far beyond the limits of the earlier knowledge, reveals the reasons for being behind the facts, thus demythologizing the false interpretations of these same facts.<sup>1</sup>

If the concept of self is socially acquired through the individual's interaction with significant others (Bowers, p 40), the responses students get from literature teachers in English classrooms, for instance, are connected to the approval or disapproval of their social and cultural identities, given the profile of literature curriculum found in English schools. Differently from that, the situation in Brazilian classrooms is one in which textbooks and lesson plans play the principal role in the determination of that interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Freire (1978) *Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (NY: Seabury Press, p 24)

## CHAPTER ONE: The Autobiography of my Question<sup>2</sup>

‘What learning allows for is the making of error  
Without fatality’  
(J. Miles, ‘Center’, *Collected Poems* 234)

Throughout recent years I have tried to define for myself the role of literature education as a subject of studies. Why ought one to study - not simply read - literature along with other academic disciplines? What contribution does literature make to individuals, to the process of education, to society? Is the artistic, socio-cultural, linguistic character of literature emphasised at school? Should it be? Is the study of literature an end in itself, or a means to reach other intrinsic aims?

Also connected with literature education at school are other questions, such as, how is a syllabus produced, by whom, under which influences and aiming at what ‘product’? What is the role of literature exams, as the A-levels in the English system, the *vestibular* in Brazil, and what sort of knowledge do they aim to test? This leads to another question, which refers to classroom methods and the kind of knowledge to be constructed in literature lessons: is its objective the creation of consumers, producers of literature, or both? Provided that a theory, according to James Britton, ‘should be a way of interpreting what has been *observed*’<sup>3</sup>, what theory, or theories, supports the literature education process, in actual practice? Can such theory be universalised? And how about historical differences, philosophical foundations and ideological influences? Among the various meanings of ‘theory’, it has been defined as ‘the kind of reflective, second-order discourse about practices that is generated when a consensus that was once taken for granted in a community breaks down’<sup>4</sup>; or as the insistent questioning of familiar categories and distinctions.<sup>5</sup> Such questioning is surrounded by conflicts, which are never openly debated in classroom situations. Theory has also been used in a broad

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<sup>2</sup> The chapter title was based upon recent feminist narrations, seeking a subjective representation which attempts to demystify exclusively patriarchal academic narratives.

<sup>3</sup> James Britton, *Literature in Its place*, p.24: ‘the word *theory* itself springs from a Greek root *theamai*, meaning “I behold” – indicating that a theory, in this original sense, should be a way of interpreting what has been *observed*.’ Britton opposes the Greek root’s suggestion of “opening up” to the often used concept of theory as a “closing down”.

<sup>4</sup> G. Graff (1994) ‘Other Voices, Other Rooms’, p 19, in Cain (ed.) *Teaching the Conflicts*.

<sup>5</sup> William E. Cain (ed.) (1994) *Teaching the Conflicts*, ‘Introduction’, p vii

sense, 'denoting an examination of legitimating presuppositions, beliefs, and ideologies'<sup>6</sup>, whereas for Gramsci, personal experience was always the point of departure for theoretical generalisations. My position in this dissertation is to consider *theory*, and its strongly felt absence in classroom practices, as a category of conceptual contexts through which it is possible to integrate perceptions, and expand them. With this in mind, I hope to lead the reader through the pedagogic-literary dilemmas and tensions which I have experienced myself, and which are the foundation of my present reflections.

### ***A Question in its Context: Formative years***

As a subject of studies, literature formally entered my academic universe in 1966, at the *Instituto de Educação*, then an élitist, selective and competitive State school for girls, which for many decades offered the only public secondary education pedagogical (primary-teacher formation) course in Niterói.<sup>7</sup> At secondary school<sup>8</sup>, literature started with reading Portugal's epic writer and poet Luís de Camões, who, in the Portuguese-speaking world, plays a similar role to that of William Shakespeare in English. The method then used required reading for the gist, with vocabulary comprehension, verse scansion, and a summary of each stanza. In order to clarify the story being told, while reading Camões' *Os Lusíadas*, for instance, historical and biographical data were supplied, and after going through comprehension checks and exercises, the class would be ready for the monthly test, leading to the term's exam. There was no question about its relevance to our politico-cultural education, or any criticism of the values that that literature represented for us; likewise, there was never any concern about other Portuguese-speaking countries or literatures. We never participated in the Latin-

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<sup>6</sup> Graff (94) 'Taking Cover in Coverage', in Cain (ed.) op cit., p 4

<sup>7</sup>The first Normal School in Brazil was created in Niterói, in 1835, which I attended as a *gymnasium* student from 1962 to 1965, and as a *normal school* student between 1966 and 1968. The Brazilian law prescribes secondary education as a minimum level for a primary-school teacher in the first four years, also called the first segment of compulsory education, after law no. 5692 of 1971, which replaced primary education. For the fifth to the eighth years of compulsory school, also named the second segment, a teacher must be a graduate in her area of teaching, with a one-year pedagogical training, which corresponds to the English PGCE. The same requirement applies to secondary-school teaching.

<sup>8</sup> In Brazil there are eight years of compulsory education, also known as first grade, followed by three years of non-compulsory second-grade schooling. At the end of eleven years of schooling, at the average age of eighteen, students sit the *vestibular* exams (pre-entrance) to enter university. Second-grade schooling can be vocational or non-vocational.

American literary corpus because, with the exception of the three Guyanas, all the other nations spoke Spanish<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps, there was a deliberate exclusion of Third World culture as an atrocious nuisance, culturally and politically inferior, as described by Said.<sup>10</sup>

This is what my secondary-school teachers of literature used to do, which was basically what I myself did in my early years of teaching; it was, then, *the* literature teaching-learning pattern known. Classroom methods placed an emphasis on concrete data such as dates, names and titles; versification, figures of speech and literary written resources were studied analytically; each literary text was read with a clear objective ahead, which was to define its genre and specific movement by producing textual evidence. The emphasis on knowledge has been pointed as a positivistic heritage strongly found in Brazilian education, but not less influenced by the Jesuits' system. In practice, the liberal-humanistic 'transmission of values' approach found predominant in the British literary education was little stressed in Brazilian education in general; literature being a compulsory subject for all, neither teachers or students were supposed to have what Mathieson calls a 'literary personality'<sup>11</sup>. The knowledge built, produced or reproduced in the Brazilian classes of literature could be measured objectively in tests and exams.

From the initial reading of classical Portuguese writers, we were tuned in to the study of Brazilian literature, starting from the epoch of the historical 'discovery' (European exploitation of resources) by Portugal in 1500. The first century and a half of colonial life is represented by the so-called informative literature, constituted of travellers' information about the Brazilian nature and natives, and also of sermons and essays produced and used by the Jesuits not only in the colonisation of the indigenous peoples, but also as historical documents for their congregation<sup>12</sup>. Bosi states that those texts cannot be considered literary, but historical chronicles, and their interest as the pre-history of our literature lies in

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<sup>9</sup>Only in the early eighties did the study of Spanish become an option as a foreign language in Brazilian schools, which so far offered either English or French.

<sup>10</sup>Edward W. Said (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 31

<sup>11</sup>Margaret Mathieson, *Preachers of Culture*, p.54

<sup>12</sup>At the time of Brazilian colonisation, the Jesuits were the most powerful and influential religious congregation in Portugal, and participated actively in the process of colonisation, especially through Christian conversion and education of the indigenous peoples. By mid-eighteenth century, Portuguese leader Marques de Pombal, King Francisco José I's Prime Minister, took drastic measures to limit their political influence and power, and the Jesuits were expelled from the colonies.

their reflection of the world's views of the time through the first observers of the country: they must be valued as temporal witnesses and as sources of thematic and formal suggestions<sup>13</sup>. Such recommendation is based upon historical, not literary criteria. In fact, the aesthetic realisation of Brazilian Literature has traditionally been linked to its 'nationalist' features.<sup>14</sup>

As a student, however, I was not trained to look at those texts as sources of thematic goodness, nor even as historical documents, but as examples of philologically exemplary language. Most Brazilian literary historians, like Antonio Cândido, do not consider the textual production from that initial colonial period as part of our literary corpus, for lack of Brazilian elements in its constitution. Invariably, informative literature was succeeded by the Baroque in Bahia and by Neo-Classicism in Minas Gerais, followed by 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romanticism in São Paulo, Rio and Recife, and Realism, Naturalism and Parnassianism at the turn of the century, mainly in Rio. Or so we learned.

Our literature was studied chronologically up to the early decades of the twentieth century, usually halting in 1922, with the Modernist manifest made public at the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, in São Paulo, which protested against the aesthetic principles valued by Parnassianism and Symbolism. With the exception of some of the so-called 'regionalist' authors representing the country's Northeast, contemporary writers were usually out of the syllabus for examinations, and left out of our classrooms. One of the reasons may be the fact that literary Modernism being such a complex concept, with a large variety of aesthetic options and vague contours, it was almost impossible to examine students' *knowledge* of 'objective' characteristics in the period following the positivist, historical approach. As Said states, processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions and by predisposition, by the authority of recognisable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts, were manifested at the level of national culture, often regarded as

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<sup>13</sup> Alfredo Bosi (1994) *História Concisa da Literatura Brasileira*, p. 13: Bosi shows how the literary search for roots in the struggle against European dominance was inspired in such informative documents.

<sup>14</sup> Silvio Romero (1953) *História da Literatura Brasileira*, 5 vol., Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, p 56: Romero wrote that whatever was written to contribute to national determination should be studied, and that should be the quality-measuring criteria of writers.

'a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from wordly affiliations'<sup>15</sup>. In this sense, acts of social imperialism occurred in the prescription of syllabuses, curricula and methods for literature education in Brazil.

Certainly, the historical approach to literature, if used critically, could be a significant source of information and reflection upon the establishment of a country's cultural character<sup>16</sup>, as well as a source of historical inquiry about politics, economics, race relations, women's role in society, from a critical standpoint. As massive quantitative information to be read through quickly and a-critically, however, literature history loses its artistic and dialogic element of relevant reflection, expression and communication. In the pedagogic-literary study of the Minas Gerais written texts and politico-historical movement, for example, not only is the historical context important, in the apprehension of the colonial restlessness, but also the philosophical issues upon which the ideologies found in the *Inconfidentes*' literature was founded, such as liberalism, and their implications. This does not seem to have ever been considered in the syllabuses prescribed for schools, according to which History has clearly overtaken Literature in terms of pedagogical objectives: students learn about the writers' conspiracy for independence from Portugal; the literary value of the *Inconfidentes* written production has always been much less discussed and emphasised.

### ***Progressivist Tentative Attempts***

By the time I got the certificate which allowed me to teach primary school, in 1968, I had decided I would not be a primary teacher. I enjoyed reading and enacting stories to children, but considered myself inadequately prepared to teach; at the age of seventeen, I felt too young to endure the strain derived from the responsibility of educating children, even if I adopted the novelty proposed by the New School Didactic Manuals, especially *Didática Geral*, by Romanda A. Pentagna, herself one of our teachers. Its basic feature was the comparison of the drawbacks of traditional teaching with the advantages of progressive learning,

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Said (1993) op. cit., p 12

<sup>16</sup> As an example, the above mentioned work by Alfredo Bosi, whose objective is a critical study of Brazilian literature history. However, it is far too complex and detailed for secondary-school study, given the present schedule and distribution of lesson time for the subject, plus the set texts.



filled with illustrative opposition charts.<sup>17</sup> Our own conventional learning methodology, however, contradicted it all, because the lessons, besides exam-driven, were not centred on us, who were not highly motivated, and far from confident and independent. In the hot months, we hoped some teacher would read the New School manuals and take us, as prescribed, to have lessons under trees in the school yard. I had a better understanding of it after reading Gramsci, for whom progressive education is connected with political authoritarianism, to the same extent that traditional approaches are a requirement 'for development of that temper of mind on which radical social criticism depends'.<sup>18</sup> This has been a permanent concern in my literature education proposition towards democratic pedagogies.

In general terms, progressive education in Brazil took two different forms: in the decades prior to the military *coup d'état*, which occurred in 1964, the New School movement had appeared as a reaction against traditional pedagogies; it was centred on pseudo-psychological principles, according to which education served to adjust and adapt individuals to society, through the 'correction' of their marginality. It survived in a minor proportion of private progressive schools. The new-school pedagogy was taken over in the late sixties and early seventies by its second form, the technicist approach: it preached scientific neutrality, inspired by the principles of *rationality, efficiency and productivity* which required rational organisation, industrialisation of objectives and mechanisation of the educational process; the technicist approach equated marginality with incompetence, and was largely implanted by developed countries interested in selling technologically obsolete artefacts to the developing societies<sup>19</sup>. In practice, it became the main feature of State-school progressivism in Brazil, and consisted of a set of techniques and methods prompting every action with abundant rules, and various kinds of skill-and-aptitude testing.

While the New School pedagogy became entangled with a practice of discrimination in the public realm, lowering the demand of contents and discipline to the masses, it consisted of a valuable alternative to the children of the *élites*, by

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<sup>17</sup> Clive Harber, in *Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy* (p.16) presents a similar list of contrasts and differences between 'tendencies of the closed mind' and 'tendencies of the open mind', from the 1979 World Studies Project.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Entwistle (1979) *Antonio Gramsci: Conservative Schooling for Radical Politics*, pp 2-3

<sup>19</sup> Dermeval Saviani (1985) *Escola e Democracia*, pp 11-18

placing the axis of the pedagogical process on the pupils, on the quality of contents, relations and teaching-learning methods. Most progressive private schools were created in response to liberal middle-class parental dissatisfaction with formal pedagogy centred on quantitative, memorisable input. Those 'experimental' schools were inspired not only in Dewey's self-growth theory, but also in A.S. Neil's free development of 'the soul', and Rogers' work on the development of self-esteem.

The most consistent attempt to develop a new-school pedagogy for the masses in Brazil was the *Escola Nova Popular* proposed by Paulo Freire in his literacy movement among illiterate adults in the poorest region of the country, the Northeast. His approach included political considerations and socio-cultural awareness. In fact, Paulo Freire became known to most Brazilian pedagogues in the early eighties, after his exile during the military state, when his ideas began to be discussed and studied by teachers, academics and Education students.

Saviani defines progressivism in Brazil as non-democratic. In truth, the technicist form it took in the Brazilian public school system, coincidentally during the military government, had ambivalent features, as the emphasis on low-ability students not being pushed against their 'own inner-selves', because behind their educational difficulties there might be family problems, ill health, or lack of environmental stimulation, found out through psychological measurement tests, and to be treated through 'understanding'. As a consequence, the gap between dispossessed problem-children and the ones who fitted in the system would be, as was, insurmountable in a few school years. In this sense, the schooling of working-class children would offer no guarantee of knowledge acquisition. Instead, it buried the middle-class inherited liberal-humanist dream of socio-economic ascension through education among the working classes, therefore imposing on them a limit in their possible participation in society's routes.

Literature, in the Brazilian form of progressivism, also served a dual purpose, either in the form of relaxing recreation for the 'less able', through the uncritically superficial use and treatment of written texts below secondary level, or as a strenuous exercise of food for memory for the academically-oriented secondary students, through the learning of formal resources and bio-historical knowledge.

While I was at school, those were already the two main approaches to literary texts as a subject of studies: either the reading for gist, to apprehend the writer's message, ideas or meanings, trying to establish extra-sensorial contact with authors through their written texts, usually in language lessons<sup>20</sup>; or the 'substantial' approach, the use of literature as an alternative complement to history, with an abundance of dates, facts, motives and socio-economic-political factors which I found much clearer, more reasonable and a fascinating discovery, as an adolescent. The impressionist attempt to guess the writer's real message appeared little trustworthy for me, for the simple reason that, as students in a repressive environment, we were allowed no voice of our own; how could I trust the 'direct intuition' of my own textual interpretation in a pedagogic world where my opinions and impressions on every other matter counted little?

Then, between the late sixties and early seventies, there was a novelty in literary critique, the newly instituted linguistic and literary formalism, with an emphasis on form and structure. It implied a new pedagogical approach, centred on the objective learning of formal elements and devices, in accordance with the technicist trend in education. Politically, this coincided with the darkest political years my generation has experienced in Brazil. Popular empowering through literature, or alternative theories, was non-existent.

### ***Literature as a Chosen Profession***

As an undergraduate student, I chose to concentrate on the Portuguese-English curriculum, which encompassed the study of both languages, and the literature of Brazil, Portugal, England and North America. We learned grammar in depth, although an initiation to linguistics was taught, as a new, politically correct option of approach to language; but how to teach it in schools was still to be systematised. Although there have been some methodological attempts towards a structured linguistic approach in language studies at school level,<sup>21</sup> there still seems to be a great deal of traditional grammar studies in most private and public schools.

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<sup>20</sup> As critically described by Eagleton, 'the poem was no more than a transparent medium through which we could observe the poet's psychological processes: reading was just a matter of recreating in our mind the mental condition of the author.' (op. cit., p. 47)

<sup>21</sup> Magda Soares has published a series of primary-school language books, with 'structural exercises', based on samples and gender-number combinations; they have been used at more alternative schools.

As a sign of times, perhaps, with the decadence of acute positivistic influence in educational theories, some of the encyclopaedic knowledge demanding pupils' mnemonic exercise has been suppressed nowadays, such as lists of rare collective nouns, exceptional gender pairings, and little used defective-verb conjugation samples.

English language was taught mainly through de-contextualised structural exercises, which supposedly followed the Cambridge model, often using Cambridge books. And literature studies still followed the bio-historical approach, although a new discipline, literary theory, parsimoniously taught in two terms, seemed to offer new possibilities, in spite of being presented in a scientific format prescribing rigorous analysis, under the influence of Saussurean linguistics and communication theories, disembodied from our own culture and social issues in general, and placing the reader at safe distance. For its lack of emphasis, I cannot truly say I learned much, specially if compared to the more representative table of contents found in the other areas of study. This is a situation similar to that discussed by Graff, when he writes that the established forms of literary study in America have neglected theoretical questions about the ends and social functions of literature and criticism.<sup>22</sup>

Brazil has maintained an educational system which consists of investing heavily in the funding of high-level universities for 'all', who happen to be, ultimately, the students who can afford to pay for private schools with an articulated commitment towards the acquisition of contents, either through better material conditions, or more effective teaching-learning methods for the examining system; and who come from middle-class homes, where education has a high market value. As Gramsci wrote, those who come from traditionally intellectual families acquire the 'psycho-physical adaptation' before entering school, already possessing attitudes learnt from the family environment, which are valued by the system<sup>23</sup>. The present system in Brazil, thus, penalises those who use the public educational services in primary and secondary levels, awarding the others with free higher education.

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<sup>22</sup> Gerald Graff 'Taking Cover in Coverage', in Cain (ed.) (1994), op cit., p 3

<sup>23</sup> Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Notebooks*, pp 42-3, apud Entwistle, op cit.

Certainly pedagogical privileges were over when, in the 70s in Brazil, the middle classes receded from the traditional State schools, driving away public money investment and the good-education aura. The extinction of *admission* exams (11 plus) prevented pupil selection on academic grounds, and vacancies were officially distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. With the end of the politics of pre-selection and exclusion, State schools gradually found that less and less investment was to come from the State coffers to be spent on physical facilities, teachers' salaries and material equipment for their clientele. As a consequence, with the appalling poverty found in the schools of the State of Rio de Janeiro, peopled with the neediest classes<sup>24</sup>, low-paid teachers have been supported by a massive dose of pure idealism, an ingredient commonly expected among female professionals, along with altruism and vocational domesticity. In this respect, the education legislators employed by the military were able to produce a school system which served anti-democratic interests at mid- and long-range.

In such ambience, very little achievement has seemed possible. Like most of my colleagues, I was frustrated and sceptical about the process of trying to teach communicative English as a foreign language, and beginning to discredit the importance of the subject I taught.<sup>25</sup> State secondary-school students needed first and above all a certified knowledge of the standard version of language and culture that would enable them to find better jobs, through self-assurance in their reading and writing skills, set on a foundation combining high self-esteem, political awareness, critical reading and expressive creativity. This would help them to build up relevant knowledge, considering that education goals should be to serve students' aims and needs, rather than support the unequal distribution of wealth and social division, in stratified paradigms. After all, there seemed to be little concern with the well-being of students. Memorisation methods and passive

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<sup>24</sup>To use the expression 'working class' is not accurate, as class conscience in Brazil is a distinct concept from the English. However, I agree with Richard Hoggart that middle-class intellectuals tend to hold a romantic view of working-class people, which leads to a 'half assumption' about political activity in working-class life, 'part-pitying and part-patronising'. *The Uses of Literacy*, 'Who are the Working Classes?', p 17

<sup>25</sup>Although I do not entirely agree with his view, at that particular moment, with those students, I would justify John White's failing 'to discover any good arguments in favour of compulsory [foreign] languages', seeing 'no reason in itself for [students] to learn the *skills* of speaking one, not least in the time-consuming way usually found in class-teaching.' *The Aims of Education Restated*, p. 153

pedagogies appeared to be not only rather outdated, but also an impediment to the general socio-cultural development, mainly of the economically deprived students.

### ***The experience with children's literature***

My frustration led me to swap from the area of foreign language teaching in second-grade classrooms to the development of reading skills and critical awareness in the school library. After nearly two years working at the library of the same secondary school, I understood that little achievement seemed possible, and asked to be transferred to a small State primary-school with years 1, 2, 3, and 4 (the 'first segment') of primary school. My required function was to activate the library, so far inactive for a decade. It seemed the ideal proposition, and although I was excited by the prospect of a brand new activity which I believed could be relevant to the pedagogical construction of social subjects, having never worked with primary education so far, I had no method of action. It was during the process of cleaning up, registering titles and getting acquainted with the books, the school's profile, its teachers and students, that I understood how the library ought to work, and what action should be taken in order to contribute concretely to the education of students as readers. I would not make reading decisions by myself, and would not impose texts on them. As a space of pleasure and problem-raising, each session in the library would begin with an informal conversation, from which a theme was picked out, followed by the reading of a thematically related text, and its reading expanded through creative activities only limited by physical facilities and resources. It required from me a previous knowledge of the reading materials available, and the permanent readiness to learn.

The experience can be better understood and appreciated by other nationals with a similar history of politico-economic oppression, with a generation of children classified as working class for lack of better naming, whose families are not catered for by the system, with scarce medical assistance, no unemployment or housing benefit, and an educational organisation which depends almost entirely on the goodwill of teachers. It explains why, on the first days of library attendance, most children asked how I had become so rich as to own all those books on the shelves; they also believed that the rest of the school was the sole property of the headteacher. However, what best showed their fragmentation as a community of

students, so differently from my own experience as a former State-school student, was their settled habit of denouncing each other's faults in order to win their teachers' attention and favour. It had become an established habit, unfortunately supported by some teachers as a (dividing) way to control their classes and manage discipline.

I had the feeling that, more than feed them stories to increase their vocabulary, or to concentrate on an upgrading of their oral expression through the use of more sophisticated structures, making them produce texts for marking, literature might be used more deeply and powerfully, as a process of self-recognition and politico-historical awareness. Given the option, I would attend to what appeared to me to be urgent educational needs, rather than literary illustration. It seemed urgent to concentrate on the local micro-physics of power that surrounded those individuals, using Foucault's terms. On the other hand, I was aware of the risk of imposing a bourgeois reality, 'where it is impossible to see the power invested in your charitable deeds, where the poor and oppressed are transformed into the pathological and inadequate'<sup>26</sup>. Also, because there must be something larger than the classroom, or the library, as the locus of dialogue, I doubted 'whether *the classroom* can become effectively dialogical as long as it is not itself in dialogue with other classrooms'<sup>27</sup>.

What I understood by educational needs was the comprehension of one's role as an individual and a member of a social group in the historical process of constructing a nation; the clear definition of political rights and duties in the democratic empowering of citizens; the right to a voice, a will, and to the representation of one's socio-cultural values in society; an attempt to examine the Foucauldian *power-knowledge* couple as basis of the positive empowering of populations in the possibility of government.

In hindsight, I do not suppose those children learned any quantitatively measurable knowledge from the project. However, they did modify their self-image and their political view of the immediate socio-political world, through 'studying, cultivating, refashioning and constituting the self'<sup>28</sup>. In that context, it meant a lot.

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<sup>26</sup> See Valerie Walkerdine (1992) 'Progressive Pedagogy and Political Struggle', in Carmen Luke & Jennifer Gore (eds.) *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, p 20, where the author discusses the psychic economy of the progressive classroom.

<sup>27</sup>G. Graff (1994) 'Other Voices, Other Rooms', in W. E. Cain (ed.) *Teaching the Conflicts*, p 34

<sup>28</sup>E. Said, dealing with Foucault's concepts, in (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 29

I could extend this summary, by relating the varied oral origins of the choice and the creative follow-up of each text that we, four hundred readers from eight classes and myself, worked on together, three times a week, for three whole years, from March 1986 to December 1988. The concrete appropriation of the literary text<sup>29</sup> happened after reading it, in the critical manipulation of a title, a character, the deviation of the text's route, an alteration of the story's plot, in agreeing or disagreeing with the author. If we stop to think that all this was performed by the same children who, less than a year before, believed the library was untouchable, and my sole possession, it seems apparent that some transformation had occurred, affecting their inner layers of world perception. I think I might say we worked on personal and social autobiographies, in the sense used by Humm referring to (women's) autobiographic writing, coming literally from "within", *a sequence of alive and vivid scenes*<sup>30</sup>. We interacted on the basis of orality, freedom of speech, creative activity and a valuation of our cultural and familial patrimonies. As a result, they learned self-confidence, individual and social self-esteem, and not only internal (between students) but also external (between students and the community) relationships were dramatically improved. Certainly, free access to the library, a room increasingly filled with books, which they learned belonged to them and made an extension of their world, enhanced their self-esteem.

Many inquiries never end, as new or re-focused questions emerge: 'curricular difficulties are not simple, one-dimensional, or static problems, and that is precisely what makes them so challenging. And teaching is, at its heart, a complex task full of complex questions'.<sup>31</sup> Different pupils in different areas, at new schools, on other levels, have required a fresh look into problems related to literature education.

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<sup>29</sup> Only children's literature was used for expressive reading, although comic magazines were always available for the children to borrow and exchange, in the library. The choice for literature was due to an intuitive belief that the 'desecrated' access to literary texts would help to enhance the children's self-esteem, as books and literature are usually associated with wealth and power (libraries for the rich, workshops for the poor).

<sup>30</sup> Maggie Humm, in Thomson & Wilcox (eds.) *Teaching Women*, p. 45

<sup>31</sup> 'Discussing Our Questions and Questioning Our Discussions: Growing into Literature Study' by Carol Gilles, in *Language Arts*, vol. 71, no. 7, Nov. 1994, NCTE, pp 506-7



### ***Expanding the View into other problems***

I will turn now to my recent difficulties, as a university professional responsible, among other functions, for the final training of language and literature teachers about to be awarded a Certificate (equivalent to PGCE in England), which will enable them to become secondary-school teachers. In that area, I have been struggling to define and conceptualise the link between the fragmented theoretical knowledge undergraduates *dive* into for four years, and the classroom outcome they must produce, when they finally emerge and are faced with the reality of our secondary schools in Brazil. How is this bridge to be built? In other words, the problem and related questions which have given origin to this dissertation are related to the pedagogical efficiency of the literature teaching-learning process in state secondary schools, which I have called literature education, its official prescription (stated aims), its observable realisation, its perception by teachers and students, involving a definition of aims, methods and results in the process of knowledge construction using literature as means to educate citizens.

Many of our university classroom discussions have been centred on the issue that education is a complex process, means and end, and requires a clear definition of its features and aims; we feel the need to determine the role of literature as a compulsory subject for secondary school education in Brazil, as well as the influences it has suffered in its contemporary history, and the possibilities of re-writing that history, in order to have a politically significant influence in our current times. What forms does it take?<sup>32</sup> It seems clear that literature at school cannot possibly be looked at as an expression of pure art aiming at contemplation. Its educational role is as important as its art-enjoyment character, because it is set at an intersection, as an interdisciplinary subject, and, differently from other subjects in the teaching-learning process, it deals with varied forms, media and objects. It involves written and spoken language, it rests, among other subjects, on history and economy, it connects with social and political matters, it addresses psychological sources, touching emotions, feelings and sensations. Its scope is

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Bancroft's 'Why Literature in the High School Curriculum?' questions the same problem. He writes: *What purpose would this information [genres, authors, literary history; elements of poetry and fiction, rudimentary tools of criticism] serve for the majority of students who will not take a college major in literature [...]?* *This situation reflects what I see as the absence of a coherent theory of literature.* In English Journal v. 83, n.8, Dec. 1994, NCTE - p.23

almost unlimited, but as a subject of study at school, its effects are not made clear, and any attempts to achieve a critical and creative mode of teaching and learning are still tentative.

Brazilian curricula prescribe the *redação* exams, for which there is no set syllabus, except for the implicit supplementation of students' informative input through media information, in order to update their awareness of contemporary social issues. Nevertheless, students are not always trained to question the media as agenda setters<sup>33</sup> who produce and control opinion, as there are no *media studies* specialists in the Brazilian school system to act as mediators for students in their tentative critique of these propaganda institutions and their messages. What is implicit in the request for examinable writing is indeed a process of exclusion based on knowledge and power, visible not only through the recognition of middle-class *parole*, but also in semiotic and graphological signs. One of the Federal universities, for instance, requests that candidates write a 'monograph' style essay to be evaluated in terms of adequacy (to a theme proposed by the examining board), of coherence/ cohesion revealed in its 'macro-structural organisation', and of argumentative competence.

As an entrance exam to the above university, *redação* is usually required as a second-phase paper, along with the specific subjects for each area, after the initial sifting of candidates. If on the one hand the valuable inclusion of a paper founded on the subjective use of the national language should be valued, on the other hand it becomes, in practice, another element of social exclusion from the academy, as implied above. It can be a selection of the very best for any course, rather than the best for the chosen area of studies. The element of inequality resides in the fact that less wealthy students usually attend State schools, with limited conditions and fewer material facilities, among which poorer libraries, which compromises their command of the required middle-class linguistic discourse, the 'cultured norm'. This exam reinforces the existence of a dual school system differentiated by equipment, facilities and access to a varied range of reading materials and other

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<sup>33</sup>As used by N. Chomsky (1994) in the film *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*.

elements.<sup>34</sup> Besides, it is difficult to imagine how a one-page essay on a general topic can prove one's 'capacity of expression'.

For Kress, genres are not neutral in their cognitive, social and ideological effects; in the case of Brazilian pre-university students, the writing act requires an increasing loss of creativity proportional to the pupil's subordination to institutional demands<sup>35</sup>. Not a set subject in the school syllabus, *redação* does not appear in the curriculum as a defined teaching-learning package. Examinable but not teachable, it should be easier, though, for those coming from the 'good' homes, whose 'middle-class' parents read and write, and who make regular use of the 'home library'.

### ***Summing up the Questions***

By tackling 'vertical impositions', such as syllabuses and exam requirements; by observing actual realisations in the process of literature education at school; and by analysing ideal propositions, from hearing what teachers and students have to say, I would surmise that one of literature's main roles as a discipline of studies is the cultural representation of societies. As such, it is important that literature enters the realm of other society-related disciplines, aiming at the production of knowledge which is relevant to individuals and social groups alike. For instance, the official contribution of literature education in Brazil has been to provide a possible combination of textual comprehension, creative writing and historical documentation. Language and literature undergraduate students in Brazil learn historical, economic, socio-political and biographic facts surrounding literature; they also read certain texts, analyse certain literary authors, periods and genres; but they continue to receive insufficient information about literary critiques, the schools of thought that allow different readings, interpretations and dialogicities between text, reader and society. What has not been part of most curricula is the process of making students aware of how knowledge is produced, how reading takes place, therefore allowing them the chance of participating actively in their society, able to intervene in the dominant discourses of their

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<sup>34</sup> Attendance is a problem in State schools, where teachers have acquired the right to a three-day menstrual leave per month, also extended to male teachers. In recent years, long strikes kept school closed for some time, in 1992 for three months.

<sup>35</sup> Kress (1982) op cit., p. 11

culture<sup>36</sup>. When teachers-to-be students finally arrive at the education faculty to study pedagogical disciplines, they have beforehand classified those disciplines as unimportant, a mere formality which separates them from their diplomas. However, there they often encounter an approach which, mainly for those who come from pedagogical secondary courses (*escolas normais*), instead of the technicist pragmatism expected, often takes them by surprise by presenting an agenda of political engagement so far rarely brought to focus in their specific academic formation.

This study tries to tackle the bridging of the gap between the specific knowledge construed in the domain of language and literature as disciplines of academic study, and the construction of such knowledge as problematized classroom material that adds to the political engagement teachers ought to be committed to, in their classrooms and in their social practices, in the two countries. How to instrumentalise literature teachers-to-be so that they can engage in knowledge production in their classrooms as to contribute to a more equal society? Literature teachers cannot be expected to be a-political in their practice, for education is a political institution.

However satisfied teachers and students may be with the creation and/or increase of social and personal *subjectivity*, traditional examination requirements still seem dominant in the measurement of pupils' abilities and preparation for adulthood in the frame of traditional attitudes of what Said has called *manufacture of consent*, as submission to authority, so that education [remains] a system of imposing ignorance<sup>37</sup>.

I have considered in this chapter the models I have encountered in my own experience as a student and a teacher of literature. Those paradigms, in spite of social, political, cultural and economic diversities and ideologies found in different forms of schooling, are designed by governmental entities preoccupied with the articulation of wider national and international interests. This is a worrying stance, if we agree that 'States are violent institutions'<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> G. Graff 'Other Voices, Other Rooms' in Cain (ed.) (1994), p 38, deals with similar issues, when quoting from the Syracuse English Newsletter.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Said (1993), op cit., p 385

<sup>38</sup> Chomsky (1994), *ibid*.

## CHAPTER TWO: The Current Context in Brazilian Literature Classrooms

In this chapter I will describe my returning 'home' and re-cognizing practices and contents of literature education, in three situations, attempting to provide grounds for the discussion of the three fundamental questions addressed by this study:

*what are the purposes of teaching and studying literature?*

*what is the present social role of literature education in schools?*

*how can we empower social subjects in literature classrooms?*

### SECTION A - Contextualizing Readings

#### The role of literature in the curriculum

In spite of the law 5692 of 1971, which proposed radical changes in Brazilian education, in practice much remained the same, as expected from vertically imposed prescriptions. Even as an undergraduate student at the time of its implementation, I could sense the difficulties and political implications which surrounded that law. Historically, at the peak of the military dictatorial regime, our economy was becoming deeply compromised by foreign debt and our people by then had learned to silence their needs, opinions and complaints. When citizenship is threatened by the permanent sight of machine guns in a mere traffic blitz, it is easy to understand how imposed laws and educational structures are enforced without discussion or social participation. Unfortunately, democratic practices can not be automatically reactivated by decree: it takes time, sometimes a long time, to build up social self-esteem and the belief in public institutions and political rights after the restoration of democracy.

There have been visible consequences in the reorganisation of our basic education, with the integration of primary and middle schools, which had as one of its objectives the consolidation of compulsory schooling in eight years, between ages 7 and 14. In order to avoid the excessive demand for university access, the law prescribed professional formation at school, or technical-skills training for all. Up to then, the dual system offered a choice between 'vocational' and academic

education, a euphemism, in practice, for the provision of different schooling for different social classes.

Brazilian expanding industrialisation required basic schooling and training, in order to increase productivity, but not necessarily the corresponding elevation of salaries. As Romanelli explains, it was in the interest of national and international enterprises that Brazilian manual labour was equipped with some education and training, in order to become increasingly productive, but remaining still very cheap<sup>1</sup>. At school, this was achieved by Law 5692, offering the usual pedagogical pattern plus a prospect for (and development of) 'aptitudes for work' for all. Nevertheless, it had a short life, and the dual system resumed, as it better attends the separation of socio-economic classes in Brazil, in the academic versus vocational education model. The surviving training courses, which require no special installations and equipment, are the vocational secondary schools which train students to be primary-school teachers, nowadays called 'pedagogic second grade', and formerly known as *escolas normais*. In order to function as training courses, they depend solely on professorial skills.

After the 5692 law, languages and literature were arranged in a nucleus named 'communication and expression'. The other nuclei were 'social studies' (composed of history, geography and social-political organisation) and 'sciences' (physics, mathematics and biology). By the law, communication and expression aimed at

the cultivation of languages which grant the student a coherent contact with his fellow-men and the harmonious manifestation of his personality, physically, psychologically and spiritually, laying stress on the Portuguese language as expression of Brazilian Culture.

Such vast—yet indefinite—aims proposition mixes different realms and different subjects of study, and is so general that it can mean anything—or nothing<sup>2</sup>. Its reading implies a set of values, for example, in the idea of 'cultivation', and not of learning, using, interacting, which would carry a more practical and down-to-earth connotation; one of the assumptions found in the dictionary, for cultivation, is *to make (the mind, feelings, etc.) more educated and*

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<sup>1</sup> Otaiza de Oliveira Romanelli (1985) *História da Educação no Brasil*, Ch 5, pp 233-5

<sup>2</sup> Inspired by John White's description of the English 1988 National Curriculum, whose bland phrases, according to the author, could almost entirely serve any kind of society, even Hitler's or Stalin's. In *Education and the Good Life*, pp 13-15.

*refined*. The official pre-definition of literary texts requires close examination: since texts are tied to circumstances and to politics large and small, their choice requires attention and criticism. According to Said, 'reading and writing texts are never neutral activities: there are interests, powers, passions, pleasures entailed no matter how aesthetic or entertaining the work'<sup>3</sup>.

The vagueness of official documents allows a certain degree of adaptability to suit different practices and interests. In fact, the teaching of literature in Brazilian schools could not be further from its prescription, still carrying the century-old design which placed an emphasis on pseudo-scientific methods and on the quantitative measurement of cognitive acquisition.

### **Viewing the system in Brazil**

A few words must be said about social classes in Brazil. The socio-economic pyramid there is above all related to spending power, rather than to birth, upbringing, or familial background. Although there are acquired behaviours, values, and ideologies which accompany and characterise different socio-economic layers, one is not necessarily born and raised in a given social class. Social upgrading is a sign of personal success in a capitalist society, and in Brazil values and attitudes are changed in the name of social ascension.

The schools observed in Brazil can be said to be situated in mixed social layers, and cannot be socio-culturally identified with precision. Whereas most of the students later interviewed classified themselves as working-class, I found out that many teachers recognise a majority of recently arrived newly-impooverished students in their State-school classrooms. Yet, this new return to public education does not seem connected to political, academic or cultural stands, but solely to financial reasons, as higher private-school fees have become impracticable for most of those who earn average salaries, which have lost their buying power, gradually corroded by inflation, national debt, and recent political changes.

By the second half of 1995, Brazil was believed to have 20% of illiterate citizens of varied ages. Six million children were out of school, one million more than in the early 1990s. The present situation is that of 30.5 million enrolled in the first year of primary school, only 13.4 million finish year eight, and a mere 3.6

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Said (1993), *op cit.*, p. 385

million enter university. In 1983, the State of Rio de Janeiro invested 17.69% of its budget in education, which dropped to 11.31% in 1992. Such percentage also includes 'education-related' expenses, that is, the payment of retirement pensions, school meals, students transport, the construction of swimming pools (most of which unfinished), among others<sup>4</sup>.

In the Brazilian public system, primary schools are usually supported and controlled by municipal governments, and secondary schools set under the State jurisdiction, as a rule. There is a reasonable offer of vacancies in primary schools (years one to eight), which decreases dramatically at secondary level. Guavatown, for instance, has only nineteen State secondary schools, and sixty-eight primary ones. This gap is filled by private schools of different price range, academic orientation, and pedagogical quality, as pointed out in the previous chapter. In recent years, opening an educational establishment has become a very lucrative enterprise, and many new schools and colleges have sprung up. For less wealthy parents, who either do not manage to find places for their children in State schools, or who believe their children will stand better chances of socio-economic success by undergoing private education, peripheral schools can be found charging lower fees and most often offering third-rate education; they sometimes hire under-qualified teachers, who work for even lower salaries, and are installed in tight buildings, with rather poor physical and material facilities, in spite of the supposedly exigent official State surveillance.<sup>5</sup>

I interviewed in March 1995 the director of *vestibular* examinations to one of the Federal universities in the State of Rio de Janeiro, who said:

We did a piece of research, in 1988, and found out that in the Great Rio area there were 178 public secondary schools, and 580 private ones. Obviously, there is a much higher proportional number of students coming from private secondary schools, because there are many more private than public ones in our State. This reflects the number of candidates we have, and it is a mere statistic problem. The problem is not the university receiving more private secondary students than public; it is a consequence of the limited number of public schools, not enough for the present demand.

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<sup>4</sup> Data provided by the IBGE, 1994, cited by Ib Teixeira, 'Uma Tragédia Brasileira', in *Conjuntura Econômica*, September 1995, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro, pp 43-45

<sup>5</sup> Any private school must attend the demands of the State Council of Education; however, in the 1995 list of 24 councillors, nine were owners (or, euphemistically, directors) of well-known private schools, ten were nominated through political injunctions and/or favours, three were publicly known as academics and educationists, and two had no public, educational or political expression. Despite its high profile, the Council has hardly had any well-defined commitment to public interests.



Lack of public investment represents the crucial element in the inequality of opportunities, in spite of the official discourse which guarantees public education for all, from primary school to university.

To analyse the official syllabus in the Brazilian educational model is to see its emphasis on quantitative knowledge; in order to succeed academically, students' attention and interests must be devoted to the acquisition of a-critical knowledge, mainly in its memory form. The literature syllabuses proposed by the majority of public universities in Brazil are firmly founded on the history of Brazilian literature; only in exceptional instances do syllabuses include women-produced texts, or some local literature.<sup>6</sup> Many reasons have been given to explain why literature syllabuses include only the standard canonical works, leaving out most contemporaries writers and all kinds of experimental literature. Brennan identifies the personification of national identity in symbols and devices, literarily represented by the novel<sup>7</sup>. Batsleer et al also write that canons consist of selections and hierarchies, which necessitate a continuous process of comparative placing and opposition.<sup>8</sup> Bowers identifies in curriculum development the presence of a deep code that reproduces the episteme of the culture, serving 'the vital function of transmitting assumptions and categories that make up the conceptual grammar used to organise thought', while this deep code remains implicit.<sup>9</sup>

Most teachers quietly comment on their students' general dissatisfaction in reading for exams a list which is more founded on exclusion than on inclusion, a practice of discrimination at the end of a long process of selective preparation and evaluation; for Batsleer et al, beneath 'the disinterested procedures of literary judgement and discrimination can be discerned the outlines of other, harsher words: exclusion, subordination, dispossession'<sup>10</sup>. Politically engaged students, such as the ones interviewed at Homer School, would like to have literary access,

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<sup>6</sup> Marly A. de Oliveira 'A História da literatura brasileira que lemos e ensinamos', in *Perspectiva*, Revista do Centro de Ciências da Educação, UFSC, Jan/Jun 88. After having researched 25 federal syllabuses, the writer found one federal institution of higher education, UFBA, which included women's literature in its programme; seven others allowed the inclusion of local literature. Pp 49-65

<sup>7</sup> T. Brennan 'The National Longing for Form' in Bhabha (ed.) 1990 *Nation and Narration*, p. 49

<sup>8</sup> Janet Batsleer et al (1985) *Reading English: cultural politics of gender and class*, p 29

<sup>9</sup> C.A. Bowers (1984) *The Promise of Theory*, p 92

<sup>1</sup> Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., p 30

at school, to current works which provide, for instance, new readings of the recent military dictatorship, for discussion and reflection.

### Teaching to the exams

Schools' survival depends to a great extent on the results they achieve in the exams. Somewhere, somehow, there is an authoritative command that demands *vestibular* exams to be in the pattern they are, with literature to be tested through periods, dates, names and characteristics, better still if well memorised. Whoever is not tuned in to the system, is out of it. The general situation found in those Brazilian schools is that a great many teachers declare themselves unhappy with the sort of literature they ought to teach: they would rather work on textual analysis and criticism, as well as in the development of reading sensibility in students. The maintenance of the 1890s positivist model for literature is at least curious and anachronistic, but remains almost untouched; it seems that teachers' and students' dissatisfaction is not sufficient to threaten the ideology of the 'national discourse' as comfortably appropriated by the ruling legislators in education. For the time being, *vestibular* exams still represent certainty, the official discourse of homogeneous knowledge and 'middle-class' cultural identity in literature education.

For instance, the 1994-5 *vestibular* literature exams for one of the Federal universities in the state of Rio de Janeiro asked students:

1. to identify both 'the Brazilian social issue' dealt with, and the literary movement setting of a poem by nineteenth-century Romantic author Castro Alves;
2. after a quotation from Antônio Cândido's *Formação da Literatura Brasileira: Momentos Decisivos*, about the wider themes found in Brazilian literature between 1750 and 1880, to find, among the themes mentioned, a symbol of national independence, as well as to identify the literary period in which such independence appeared.

Neither question seems to justify three years of extensive studying the literature produced in Brazil (and in most cases, in medieval Portugal) since 1500. Nor do they offer a critical contribution to social, cultural and political reflection about the literature of the country, despite the reference to 'social issue' and national symbol. Such questions seem to ratify the superficiality found in the teaching-learning pedagogies based upon large amounts of memorisable contents,

as officially prescribed for literature education. In reality, these questions represent the production of a habitus founded on scientificist methods, aiming to test students' evidence of objective knowledge of literary facts. They encourage a contemplative and non-transformative version of knowledge offering atomistic data, which makes it difficult 'to theorize the social field as a total, mutable entity'<sup>11</sup>.

Another paper asked candidates to describe 'the distinctive aspects between (canonical modern) writers Graciliano Ramos and José Lins do Rego', not forgetting to identify the literary movement their works represent. Another question asked students 'to describe the treatment of nature given by Romantic writers', following the quotation of a text by Neo-classical poet Tomás Antônio Gonzaga. Such questions inevitably confuse candidates, by mixing different periods, characteristic treatments of matters, and authors' names together. This seems not sufficient to justify the study of literature, nor to claim for a central role for the subject, considering its present hybrid profile which, although history-based, lacks relevant critical historicity, with its intrinsic contradictions and limits.

The multiple-choice examination paper specially applied to Letters candidates had twenty questions, of which three quarters tested language and one fourth tested literature. Of those, four were comprehension questions centred on the interpretation of a poem by contemporary woman writer Adélia Prado; and one focused on modern romanticism, illustrated by another contemporary poet, Vinícius de Moraes.

Curiously, on testing Letters' candidates' specific aptitude and knowledge, poems rather than novels were used, possibly because the general Literature paper is supposed to aim for a broader selection in cultural and economic terms, through national representation in literary novel form, whereas prospective students of language and literature should be emotionally competent, able to read on sensorial and emotional layers of thought.

Another Federal university in Rio demanded from 1995 *vestibular* candidates in their literature papers that they showed evidence of their knowledge of:

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<sup>11</sup> Carl Freedman. 'Theory, the Canon, and the Politics of Curricular Reform' in Cain (1994) (ed.), *op cit.*, p 61

aesthetic creation, literary and non-literary language, literary genres; the Brazilian literary process, in connection with Brazilian history and culture; Romanticism in Brazil, contrasted with Baroque and Neo-Classicism (poetry, fiction and drama); Realism in Brazil, Naturalism and Impressionism (fiction); Parnassianism and Symbolism (poetry); Modernism in Brazil, compared to past movements, its elements of permanence, opposition and transformation; the 1945 poetry, and main tendencies post-1945.

A programme of studies such as this, produced in the ivory towers of the academy, seems cognitively far-fetched and socio-culturally short-sighted, and elicits the wide gap between prescribed contents and realistic possibilities and achievements. The inevitable acceleration of input renders classroom discussion, exchange and responsible problematization apparently impossible goals for teachers and students alike.

Not less important is the question of a theoretical vacuum, directly linked to teachers' formation at university, as stated above, a crucial problem of difficult solution. To Graff, 'theory is what breaks out when agreement about such terms as *text*, *reading*, *history*, *interpretation*, *tradition* and *literature* can no longer be taken for granted'. He believes that the academic separation between departments, and units, creates a theoretical vacuum through the isolation of periods, genres, categories; and the established curriculum's poverty of theory penalises the average student, who 'lacks command of the conceptual contexts that make it possible to integrate perceptions and generalize from them'.<sup>12</sup>

As long as scholars, generalists, and critics covered their turfs within self-enclosed classrooms, the average student did not need to be aware of the clashes of principle, much less use them in a larger context for literary study. (Graff, p 9)

With a low social self-esteem, State-school teachers in general do not see themselves as producers of knowledge, but mere consumers of whatever better equipped thinkers may offer them. In the case of literature textbooks, for example, authors/scholars set the classroom rules, format, method and provide the 'theory'.

These and related dilemmas will become more evident through the description of literature practices found in some Brazilian classrooms, observed between March and April 1995.

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<sup>12</sup> Graff (94) 'Taking Cover in Coverage', in Cain (ed.), op cit., pp 4-5

## **SECTION B - Closely Observing Literature Classes**

### **Re-entering the Brazilian school system**

I returned to Brazil for a period of one month, after one-and-a-half years in England. It was important not only to re-examine the situation of schools, the education system and more specifically the teaching-learning of literature, but also to test the acquisition of a more distanced perspective of problems in which I have been involved all my life, in the country I was born in, and which concern the welfare and happiness of my fellow-citizens. As a rule at State schools, the same teachers work with language and literature, as opposed to the organisation at private schools, where there is a group of literature teachers. However, whereas in the English system there is hardly any separation between language, literature and writing, in Brazil these subjects are examined separately, and have distinct syllabuses.

At the beginning of the school-year, in March/April 95, not only were teachers having to cope with the problem of lower-than-ever salaries, but also the newly inaugurated Federal government was intent on establishing a new time-limit for retirement in general, increasing teachers' working years from 25 to 35. The official justification was the economic measures for inflation control, limiting thus the ever-growing number of pensioners, although municipal, State and Federal politicians continued to award themselves higher wages. The threat of ten more compulsory working years under financial hardship caused a large number of teachers to hand in their retirement files hastily before the new law passed, aggravating the general situation in public schools.

The first of the schools visited was Homer School, a traditional State secondary, receiving a mix of the newly deprived and the habitual clientele (low middle-class and working-class students) in the morning and afternoon shifts, and lower-income students in the evenings. The second, Figtree School, a vocational secondary college which trains primary teachers, caters for a similar sort of social cross-section as Homer School, with an emphasis on the lower classes, and with a morning shift only. Timetables at Homer were determined according to the results obtained at the *informal* language and mathematics test applied on candidates



before the beginning of the school year. The students with higher results were allocated vacancies in the morning shift, the following group would get afternoon classes, and finally the evening shift was filled with the students assessed as least competent or less academically oriented. Unsurprisingly, slightly better resources were found in the morning classes. At Figtree, all classes were in the morning period, with afternoons dedicated to students' apprenticeship at the adjoining primary school, and the evening shift occupied by a *supletivo*, that is, literacy and primary schooling for adults.

Both schools received an absolute majority of students who lived in distant peripheral suburbs and commuted to school, often having to take more than one form of transport to get there. In common, Homer and Figtree are both State secondary schools which offer a three-year course, catering for students aged between fifteen to eighteen, sometimes older. As the number of public secondary schools decreases dramatically in relation to the offer at primary-school level, these students are seen as a quantitative minority in the public system of the country. Both Homer and Figtree were founded in the early 19th century, and up to the 70s were renowned for the competitive selectivity of their entrance exams. After the implementation of Law 5692, which abolished entrance exams to State schools, they became non-selective, and started to lose their middle-class clientele, gradually receiving a larger intake of lower middle-class and working-class students. At the same time, the State gradually withdrew its responsibility, by lowering salaries and limiting investment to the minimum necessary for schools to keep their doors open.

The main differences between Homer and Figtree schools lay partly in the curriculum, partly in the profile of both teachers and taught as *marked* with the 'vocational' stamp. At Figtree the programme of studies encompassed the regular syllabuses, plus the so-called pedagogical subjects. This differentiated their course from any other non-vocational secondary school. Such pedagogical subjects - general didactic, special didactic (for language, mathematics, social sciences, and biological sciences), educational psychology, schooling structure - were much valued by the almost entirely female clientele, reinforcing the vocational character of the course. Also some of the teachers declared that they appreciated the

*motherly* characteristics they saw in their students, and which they considered fundamental for their pedagogical exercise as future teachers.

Although the contents of the literature programme were the same for all secondary schools, designed by academic specialists, there could be felt a dichotomy between the academic orientation of Homer students, all of whom were planning to enter university, and the vocational attitude among Figtree students, who seemed to view their acquisition of a primary-teacher diploma as their intellectual goal, and the end of - or at least a temporary halt in - their academic careers. Consequently, practices were quite distinct, with teachers at Homer aiming at their students' passing the *vestibular* exams, and closely following the syllabus, and Figtree teachers allowing variations and incursions into popular songs and children literature.

At both schools there was a serious shortage of teachers, causing students some days to travel to school only to find out that they had no lessons. At Figtree I saw a group of third-year students approach the language and literature co-ordinator asking for a solution to the problem; at Homer, students organised a demonstration and, at rush hour, interrupted the traffic on the main avenue at the city centre, marching in protest against the government's intentional inertia towards education.

Although the social composition of teachers and students was not dissimilar, its definition was far from simple. At Homer School, at least five of the literature-language teachers were also writers of textbooks for classroom use, which was not the case at Figtree. The general level of political and literary information seemed in general higher at Homer, with some of the teachers discussing methods, aims, and political influences with remarkable self-confidence. I could sense their antagonism towards the literature and language co-ordinator, for his overt right-wing attitudes towards students, the system, and education in general. On the other hand, Figtree teachers kept a lower intellectual profile, and seemed to associate the professional habitus to politics only in terms of salaries and working conditions. None of the teachers viewed and interviewed there acknowledged the political role of teaching literature in a multicultural society, or the possibilities of awareness and problematization that the discipline could raise, unlike many of Homer teachers.

At both schools, teachers described their students as a 'special kind' of middle class, with an average of 70% coming from private schools, whose fees they could no longer afford. My own perception was that, whereas that might be accurate in relation to part of the morning shift students at Homer, who seemed to come from families who had recently lost some of their spending power, the afternoon students interviewed described themselves as working class. The afternoon students did not seem to hold the same sort of overt middle-class values as the morning ones, in spite of being financially capable of acquiring the same commodities, such as brand name clothes. I had the feeling that the morning students considered studying at Homer as a temporary situation until 'better times came', whereas the afternoon ones did not seem to place a high social value on getting private education.

One of Homer teachers said she saw this new social grouping as beneficial to the working-class students, who 'could borrow materials from their wealthier classmates' (Martha), while another valued the middle-class newcomers for the levels of socio-political consciousness they raised in their less privileged classmates (Judy). Another teacher viewed public schools as a realm of freedom and self-regulation, because discipline, uniform, individual work were not regularly checked and controlled, forcing students to feel responsible for their own education (Almir). At Figtree, one teacher considered her students as 'totally middle-class, if not by spending power, by borrowed socio-cultural values', (Louise), whereas two other teachers there considered their students rather needy, functionally illiterate, and coming from humbler backgrounds (Ney and Lena). In brief, since it was rather complex for teachers to determine their own students' social constitution, I had to rely on students themselves to identify their social profile. Some of Homer students who came from homes with a reasonable buying power regretted studying at a State school at a time of teacher shortage, and viewed their reduced chances of passing vestibular exams as the main element of disadvantage in relation to students from private schools. There seemed to be, among some of the less privileged students, a resigned attitude, as if fate had thrown them at Homer at a difficult time. Variations also were found at Figtree, where some of the interviewees wanted to enter university 'one day', to follow a teaching-related course, such as Pedagogy, 'Letters', or Psychology, but where there were also



third-year students voicing their concern for their academic futures, certainly at risk given the lack of teachers.

Classroom strategies at Homer appeared more content-oriented, whereas at Figtree there seemed to be a stronger concern with techniques and didactic strategies. None of the teachers at either school ever changed the disposition of chairs, set in rows by the cleaners at the end of each shift. However, both schools held weekly language-literature meetings between teachers and co-ordinators, where general problems were supposed to be discussed, such as the syllabus, its implementation, sharing strategies, and students' problems. In fact, what was possible to observe at Homer was an individualist defence of principles, without teachers uniting for the construction of relevant practices. At Figtree, all the while I was there, co-ordinating meetings were led by the head of department, problems were discussed, a new teacher introduced and immediately assimilated by the group, although most of the time the main topic remained the low salaries paid by the government.

As at both State schools teachers of literature also taught language, they separated the subjects by weekday. At Homer, Figtree and (private) Springhill, there was a rotating adoption of each of the three more popular literature textbooks, by authors Faraco & Moura, José de Nicola, or Douglas Tuffano. None was reported as satisfactory by the teachers, but were adopted for lack of better material which systematised contents, as preparation for the *vestibular* exams. The exams, in fact, dictated contents and practice. The new book introduced for use at the experimental school, by Dr Samira Campedelli, a professor at University of São Paulo with a PhD in Letters, was being considered the best alternative available, in terms of its ideology and methodological suggestions. Her set of three books, one for each year of secondary school, sent to me gratis by her publishers, attempts to offer black-and-white pictures of paintings and sculptures (referred to as *detailed iconographic research*), and *critical texts* focusing on the functions of literature, form and content, denotative and connotative language, with textual illustration. Besides the excessive data, it does not stimulate teachers to think, add, or contribute, but instead they are given the whole set ready for their students' (and their own) steadfast consumption. All answers are given, and despite the critical dressing, it merely seems a more sophisticated version of the same familiar reading-

answering-checking pattern in literature classrooms. Teachers are treated as consumers of didactic material which was meant to 'facilitate' their lives and everyday classroom routine, or else, a better-equipped 'colleague' doing the lesson-planning for them. In general, all of those textbooks presented a similar uncritical view of historical facts surrounding literature, keeping to the contemplative, non-transformative mainstream of literature through historical facts, following Europeanised, phallogentric, hegemonic models, in obedience to the demands of the universities' entrance exams.

A majority of female students was found in all of the (compulsory) literature classes at the State schools, pointing to their longer permanence at school, in comparison with male students. More male students from working-class backgrounds often drop out after compulsory education than their female counterparts, as they many times are expected to enter the workforce and contribute to the family budget. Thus, the gender issue seems more related to socio-economic characteristics than to subject-related problems. Also, both at Homer and at Figtree, there was a predominance of non-white students, an indication of socio-cultural class definition in Brazil, for historical reasons.

Springhill, a private experimental full-time institution, more talked about for the high fees charged from the children of moneyed parents than for the alternative philosophy proposed when it was inaugurated in the mid-60s, was chosen as the third school. Although my main interest lay on the State system, Springhill would provide data for optimum comparison, with its high profile, highly paid teachers, excellent results in the examinations, and the 'cream' of the local middle-class society as students. I was later to be surprised by encountering more similarities than differences between Homer School and Springhill, such as the number of students per classroom, the academic profile of teachers, the textbooks adopted for literature studying, the physical facilities, and pedagogical approaches. The difference, then, appeared to be more cultural and socio-economic than properly intellectual or academic, explaining why middle-class parents have to pay high fees when their children could receive similar instruction for free. Beyond the point of looking at the option for private education as being a matter of guarantee of daily lessons and socio-economic status, lies a deeper political question of cultural, social and economic issues in a society where all are equal according to its

Constitution, but some are 'more equal than others', and go to private schools. There were only three black students among all the classes seen at Springhill.

### Figtree School

150-year-old Figtree School is one of the most traditional teacher-formation State secondary schools in Brazil. While in the sixties it was peopled mostly with middle-class students, in the last decades there seems to have been hardly any interest among middle-class girls in opting for primary teaching, first of all, because of its working-class representation, reinforced by very low salaries and even lower social status. Besides comprising the three years of studies prescribed, Figtree offers the option of a fourth year, in which students can specialise in an area recognised by primary-school regulations, such as modern mathematics, or children's literature. In 1995, there were four year-three groups, eight year-two, nine year-one and two year-four classes. Its pedagogic syllabus seemed to be centred on behavioural training and mechanised techniques, with an implicit emphasis on personal virtues, such as an endless love for children, a natural motherly attitude made worse by being much confused with childish, and a shallow, gratuitous appeal to the senses and emotions. My observation was later to be confirmed by Lena, one of the literature teachers, when I asked her whether the girls already behaved like that when they entered the course, or if that was consequential to the course's profile. Lena said she believed that cause and consequence were probably difficult to determine, and in general those girls were *much easier to deal with than the regular secondary-school students, for their caressing, maternal, sweet and easy-going ways*. In her view, primary teachers in general should be 'special' people, even if not too bright, but full of inherent virtues, such as patience, intrinsic goodness, intuition and a sense of the profession as a mission.

Grumet defines the female curriculum as *the presence of an absence*<sup>13</sup>. Using her equation, it might be said that the hidden curriculum in the formation of primary teachers in Brazil, as secondary-school students, becomes a physical

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<sup>13</sup> Madeleine R. Grumet (1988) *Bitter milk: Women and Teaching*, p. xiii: the writer refers to 'the curriculum, the course of study, the current compliance, general education, computer literacy, master teachers, the liberal arts, reading readiness, time on task' as presences, while 'absent is the ground from which these figures are drawn, negation and aspiration', darkness and light.

presence in the expectation of inherent qualities which associate motherhood and domesticity to the teaching of young children, while emptying the profession of contents coherent with the ideologies of participatory democracy. At Figtree, literature education seemed to reinforce the absence of dialectical social practices, not only in the more restricted offer of contents, but also by placing an emphasis on technicist practices and pedagogic methods served as recipes to be followed.

What appears to be the central problem is that hardly ever vocational pedagogical teaching emphasises democratic pedagogies through politically and pedagogically relevant contents, limiting their appropriation of critical-theoretical instruments which might allow them to claim their education as their own. Every year hundreds of Figtree School's female students are certified as primary teachers and entitled to be in charge of their own classes, repeating the pattern, using the same a-critical pedagogy with another generation, without 'substantial knowledge' or a consistent idea of the socio-political role of education. Grumet writes that

if both schooling and the family are epiphenomenal to the economy and the workplace, then they are only arenas for the subordination of children to the status quo and are forever fortified against our transforming theory and practice<sup>14</sup>.

This is intrinsic to the political questions of an academic dead-end for vocational secondary-school students, since the course in actual practice offers a level of academic contents below *vestibular*-exams requirements; it also addresses the question of their training as primary teachers who, uncommitted to social justice, will be part of a system structured for the maintenance of social class division, through the ideology of pseudo-family relations in public education. The fact that their literature education, for instance, does not guarantee the current common-core learning of factual data around literature, no matter how positivistic and a-critical, reinforces their exclusion from the academic curriculum and consequently the stigma around technical/vocational courses.

On subsequent visits to Figtree, I was again invited to join the literature co-ordination meeting, in which discussion was centred on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration: some teachers suggested they should write and send a manifest to the leading newspapers, denouncing their salaries, working conditions and limitations.

Figtree School's syllabus was handed out to me as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> Grumet, op cit., p xiv

Year 1 - LITERATURE: language and culture; literature, art and culture (concepts, functions, literary forms); literature and non-literary language; the history of literature; Medieval age: a panorama (oral expressions/ *cancioneiros*/ songs); Humanism (Gil Vicente); theme and message; narrative structure (characters, plot, theme, point-of-view, environment, time, direct, indirect and free indirect speech); extra-classroom readers

Year 2 - revision of year 1; Classicism: panorama/ Luís de Camões/ informative literature; Baroque: panorama/ poetry (Gregório de Matos)/ prose (Antonio Vieira); Neo-Classicism: panorama/ Cláudio Manuel da Costa, Tomás Antônio Gonzaga, Santa Rita Durão, Basílio da Gama; Romanticism: panorama (characteristics)/ poetry (Gonçalves Dias, Casemiro de Abreu, Álvares de Azevedo, Castro Alves)/ prose (José de Alencar, J. M. De Macedo, Bernardo Guimarães, Taunay); theatre (Martins Pena); narrative structure; theme and message; extra-classroom readers

Year 3 - revision of Romanticism; Realism, Naturalism, Parnassianism: panorama/ authors: Machado de Assis, Artur Azevedo, Domingos Olímpio, Olavo Bilac, Raul Pompéia; Symbolism: panorama/ authors: Alphonsus de Guimaraens, Cruz e Souza; Pre-Modernism: avant-garde movements; Modernism: panorama/ authors: Graciliano Ramos, Carlos Drummond de Andrade; theme and message; narrative structure; extra readers.

### *Teachers' habitus*

I watched six lessons with Lena, four with Ney and another four with Louise. The three teachers courteously introduced me to their classes, and explained to me which part of the syllabus they were going to be dealing with, as it was the beginning of the school year for them. Ney and Lena were starting Classicism with their year two classes, and Louise, according to the programme, should be revising Romanticism with her year-three groups, but instead she preferred to concentrate on out-of-programme children literature. Their habitus will be described as presented by themselves to me during observation and subsequently, at the interviews.

The three teachers described their own background as middle class, with foreign ancestry, a common feature in Brazil. All remembered having started reading literature at an early age, following the example set by their parents and grandparents, who used to live in the same household. As required by the Brazilian education laws, the three teachers had a degree in Letters, and Lena also had a degree in Journalism. Both Lena and Ney came from inland, whereas Louise was born and raised in the inner-city environment. Ney pointed out the marked influence of a history teacher he had studied with at secondary school on both his own teaching style and the interdisciplinary approach he used in his literature

classes, to a point that *'sometimes students ask me whether I'm a teacher of history or of literature and language'*. Louise's formative years had been influenced by a teacher of literature she had had while a student herself at Figtree School, in the late 60s. This teacher, according to her, had brought relevance to the subject, making connections and trying to construct knowledge in class, together with her students. After her degree in Letters, Louise had started a master's degree, which she had not yet been able to complete. Lena, the youngest of the three, then in her early thirties, reported how she had become a teacher almost by chance, and how while studying literature at university she had started *'to make sense of the mechanics of periods, genres, movements and dates'*, and had been able to appreciate it.

Their schema of lesson planning was dichotomous, either following the syllabus through the textbook in every detail (Ney and Lena), or by improvising lessons *'in the car, on the way to school'* (Louise). Of the 'planners', Ney seemed the more skilled, with a large experience acquired as a former researcher of rare manuscripts. He said he tried to make his lessons more interesting by bringing in additional texts and reading material, which he usually shared with Lena. Both declared to resent the department's individualism, and, in order to compensate for it, whenever possible they did their lesson planning together. On the other hand, Louise confided that she found it extremely difficult to plan things in advance, that she had had a great deal of 'didactic' difficulty while training to be a teacher, and classroom chaos was only avoided by some last minute insight she usually had, thinking of 'something' to do with her class. This did not seem true, by observing her lessons, for which she seemed to have gathered duplicated sheets, a tape recorder, a tape, a piece of jewellery, and prepared two stories to tell students orally. Perhaps her understanding of lesson planning was different from other teachers', and she felt the lack of some deeper reflection, as she expressed later in self-critical manner. Nevertheless, she said she tried to follow the syllabus, not because she wanted to, but because *'there are people watching what we do'*, possibly the co-ordinator, or the head of the school. Whereas Louise's lessons counted on a variety of resources brought by her following a plan, there did not seem to be any clearly stated aims, as a superficially uncritical exercise on a theme. Louise had brought to class a piece of jewellery made by order of her grandfather

from her grandmother's hair, woven with gold threads, as initial motivation to talk about the social role of 'hair'. She told two stories from children literature, brought a cassette player, duplicated sheets with a song by a popular Brazilian singer, and discussed with students the importance of long and short hair for women throughout history. Albeit interesting, the exercise seemed to aim at nothing clear, leading students to no relevant conclusion apart from having had a bit of fun.

Ney's planning had included bringing to his class an epic poem in an abridged version for children, which he had one student read out to the class, as well as distributing duplicated sheets with a text about 'an inner voyage', followed by comprehension questions:

What does the Earth represent/mean to man? What did man perceive after conquering the Moon and the planets? What voyage will be left for Man to realise at last? Or What is the poet's proposal? According to the text, Man must 'humanise' himself to be happy. Quote Man's de-humanisation today.

Both pieces had the function of inducing students' interest and preparing them to tackle *Os Lusíadas*, the Renaissance epic poem by Luís de Camões about Portugal's overseas conquests. However, he did not manage to engage the group of twenty female students in the activity, and by sitting at the back of the class I could perceive their lack of concentration or interest in the lesson. Every so often, Ney would interrupt the student's oral reading to explain a point in the text, or to emphasise a characteristic, but the rest of the students apparently found it difficult to get the gist of what was being read, unable to follow Ney's attempts to engage them in a discussion. What they seemed to want was simply a set of brief notes as something concrete to rely on and feel culturally and intellectually secure. Lacking charisma and communication skills, Ney seemed at a loss by students' evident boredom, lack of attention and insistent requests to leave. Later, at the interview, he blamed their difficulty to concentrate on their limited literacy skills, which made it difficult for them to make sense of textual meanings.

Lena's planning was centred on the textbook adopted, by J. Nicola. The only variation attempted was to set some extra comprehension questions as team work, written on the chalk board, and again based upon information supplied by the textbook. These were the questions written on the board:

Humanism was a cultural movement which agitated the final decades of medieval age. What was its main characteristic? How does Renaissance appear and what characterises it? What is the relationship between Humanism and Renaissance? What is Classicism? What are the principal characteristics of Classicism?

All the questions required listing a period's set traits and characteristics, and little critical reflection.

In the first group there were twenty-eight all-female students, among whom was a mature student, aged 45 then, who later volunteered to be interviewed. The majority of those year-two students, whose average age was seventeen, was engaged either in private conversation, or in the preparation of collage material for their didactic teaching practice. Meanwhile, Lena's efforts went almost unnoticed by the students, but that did not seem to disturb her much. The topic was also *Os Lusíadas*, but differently from Ney, Lena went straight into textbook information, talking about verse metre, the contents and the organisation of the poem. Knowledge seemed to depend on her reading and translating from the textbook.

Puzzled by Lena's teaching strategies which re-enforced the gendered status of primary-teachers training, I ended my observation of her classrooms with a question lingering on my mind: what kind of teachers would her students be? As asked by Walkerdine, were those students to be knowers, or potential nurturers of knowers?<sup>15</sup>

The three teachers concentrated the description of their professional difficulties on the cognitive ability of their students, considered below the necessary level of reading proficiency and literary experience. In this sense, they had similar queries to their English colleagues, expecting from students a *patrimony* of literary knowledge which they associated to the middle classes. Whereas Louise believed that they were uninterested in cultural matters, Ney believed that there was a flaw in a system which allowed semi-illiterate students to reach secondary school, practically unable to make sense of what they could barely read. Besides, he found the lack of interdisciplinary connection a factor that interfered negatively, since teachers of literature had to end up explaining historical, economic, social and political issues to little knowledgeable students, therefore wasting time which should have been allocated to the studying of literature. Ney's view of literature was totally history-founded, and he missed the opportunity he had had at one of the first schools he had taught at, of planning

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<sup>15</sup> V. Walkerdine (1992), 'Progressive Pedagogy and Political Struggle', in Luke & Gore (eds.) *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, p 21. Walkerdine analyses the situation of working-class and black children, who 'conform rarely to the ideal child', adding that the education of girls and women render them fit for maternal nurturance, pathologizing activity and passion.



contents and lessons together with the history teacher. Lena made an odd request, by saying that she missed the study of Latin at school, extinct since the sixties, because of the etymological foundation it provided students with, the sort of knowledge 'fundamental' for literature students.

An important issue for my research was to find out how those teachers associated their teaching of literature to society's current issues, of different sorts. During the lessons, only Louise brought up a gender issue, by discussing with her students, all female except for one student, the social control exerted over women throughout times, which was also metaphorically represented in the hair styles found in different cultures and societies. One student sitting next to me talked about male power, and how in some social groups in Brazil women still find it essential to grant male consent (father's, fiancé's or husband's) for their acts.

Louise's use of children literature, albeit leading to the eventual discussion of social issues, set political limits around itself, reinforcing the *feminisation* of literature which implies a school curriculum sexually divisive, a choice ambivalent and full of contradictions<sup>16</sup> when opting out of the instituted programme for secondary schools. In pedagogical terms, it is crucial to recognise that the personal is always political, as politics is 'a question of language, consciousness, identity, history'<sup>17</sup>. It is true that any reading, children literature included, involves a kind of work, a labour of recognition and interpretation; however, it was not clear to me, Louise, or her students, what the theoretical basis was in her attempt to opt out of the programme. Neither was there any explanation about what was found, what the search for meanings was, how significant findings were, to whom, and in which social conditions. After talking about her own pedagogical training, Louise criticised her students' reading habits, which she judged 'appalling' - *they have no formation as readers, no interest* - and stated that in her view literature should be studied in a more interdisciplinary fashion, so as to facilitate teachers' work. Louise made a remarkable distinction between 'attracting students to reading', 'knowing what is going on', and 'giving them the syllabus', which I believe are central points in the discussion of literature contents in Brazilian secondary schools.

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<sup>16</sup> This point is analysed by Batsleer et al. (1985), op cit., pp 142-3

<sup>17</sup> Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., pp 8-9

Ney's lessons emphasised the acquisition of literary contents, whereas Lena's seemed to present a strong didactic element, as she highlighted techniques, such as verse scansion, and did not seem to mind the fact that her students were engaged in the distracting preparation of practical materials for their training apprenticeship. At the interviews, Louise showed resentment against the low social worth of teachers at the State of Rio de Janeiro, and had decided to take a leave on medical grounds, as a bizarre form of retaliation, which would certainly be prejudicial to her students only; there was no provision of substituting teachers at the State, and her students would probably have to do without literature education for the duration of her leave.

Ney and Lena described themselves as politically apathetic, 'going with the stream'. They tried to present a professional posture of technically competent professionals, which they naively substituted for an overt socio-political commitment. For instance, Ney pointed out as a politically revealing act his having brought for his students to read and analyse the imaginary diary of an aborted foetus, quite popular in the 70s. Even his view of literature as a discipline closely connected with history was centred on positivist features, which barred problematized concepts from his classrooms. Lena spoonfed her classes with pre-digested information which, allied to her own view of the worth of literature as a discipline of study, made visible what amounted to be an uncritical infantilization of the students.

Does the historical presentation of literature really promote the acquisition of objective knowledge about the nation? To 'get totally cultured' for Ney and Lena seemed to represent the acquisition of socially valued contents, or entering a higher realm of culture for leisure and self-fulfilment. The undeniable factor surrounding literature education at Figtree School was difficulty in its various forms, exposing students' insufficient reading, inadequate literary habits and verbal response to 'inner thoughts', to poetry, with hardly any connection with social issues and real life. Teachers and students of literature acknowledged that discussions about 'anything' occurred in psychology or other pedagogical subjects, while literature was identified as a hybrid combination of language with history. However, when one of the students, among a range of suggestions, claimed for *a clear correction* of exercises following a systematisation of methods, it raised the

question of a lack of method in literature classes. One of the reasons may be the permanent training in didactic techniques and classroom approaches which students at the vocational college are impregnated with, and which becomes part of their cognitive construction based on order, organisation and... progress.

Lena, Ney and Louise, who had no other jobs in private schools, viewed their students differently, in terms of social class. Louise classified her students as part of an emerging middle class, moneyed but still living in the outskirts of the city; she told me only a minority among them were really needy. Although she saw them as different from the 'arrogant élites who attend the private schools', Louise resented their identification with middle-class values; for example, she said, they had often turned to her and said 'poor thing, to have to work for 178 *reais* (roughly £120) a month...' 'It's very unpleasant', she said. 'But the school direction, some teachers and even students, say that they cannot buy the textbooks, whereas I know they're not deprived, as many think.'

### *Modes of learning*

A common feature among the students viewed at Figtree School, with the three teachers, was the display of immature behaviour visible in various forms. For instance, Lena's students behaved in a constant childish fashion, calling her 'auntie', and imitating animals' voices to tease each other. Lena herself later declared to find all 'very cute, as evidence of their kindness and sensitivity, as they hugged and kissed teachers after every lesson'. She compared them favourably to her former students at Homer school, 'a male environment with colder and more distant relations'. Childishness and motherliness were qualities valued at Figtree, as a vocational college with an emphasis on personal interaction and sensitivity, instead of on contents. The only visible exception was R., the 45-year-old mature student, who at the second time I was observing lessons in her class, opened the book and, pointing at it, said to me: '*it's mostly History, plus language. That's why I've already told you it's a useless subject, literature... It should be removed from the curriculum*'.

In Ney's classes, students joked at each other, ridiculed classmates who volunteered to read aloud, asked him to let them leave earlier, and while he set a time for the task, they engaged in conversation about all sorts of topics, without

getting down to work. They did not seem to relate to literature, not to the topic of the day, or to Ney's strategy. The questions he set, anyhow, appeared extremely superficial and irrelevant to grasp their attention, lacking challenge, exchange, and thinking action. Behaviour was irreverent, apparently made worse by Ney's failure to mediate knowledge production.

In one of Louise's classes, there were three mature students, in their late twenties, and the only male student in the whole course. Because she provided material resources, students were attentive and participated actively, and kept silent while she was telling them stories. Although the content of Louise's lessons was not in the syllabus, opposed to Ney's and Lena's, she seemed to have achieved a deeper level of interaction with her students than her colleagues, whose students were overtly, deeply bored by the apparent aimlessness of the whole pedagogical exercise performed in their classes.

The students interviewed in Lena's classes described themselves as coming from the city's outskirts, of working-class families, and viewed the possibility of entering the work-force as primary teachers as a chance of getting a profession and start to earn some money right after secondary school, which would not have been possible if they had opted for a non-vocational college. All of the interviewees said they were happy to start working as soon as they got their diplomas, and declared to feel secure about their own performances as primary teachers. Not even one questioned their conceptual gaps and omissions; no one looked at themselves with critical eyes; not even one acknowledged the crucial political role of their teaching primary school level, consequently reproducing the same uncritical, positivistic, superficial paradigm applied to them. As already pointed out, the school subjects more highly valued by the majority were those related to their apprenticeship in the pedagogical area, not only for the contents, but also for the possibility of 'discussing things'. When I asked what sort of things they discussed, whether current social issues, politics, or anything else, they answered that they discussed didactic strategies, and educational psychology, such as children's learning needs. It was bewildering to compare their complete distance from education as a social, cultural, and political subject, whereas at Homer school I found a few students discussing Paulo Freire's philosophy.

At Figtree, students' habitus were apparently determined by pedagogical strategies, which allied to a linearisation of contents designed the profile of those who will be responsible for the education of newer generations. As insufficiently prepared teachers, they will certainly reproduce the same little challenging mode of teaching based on the memorisation of contents, fear of challenge and problematization, consensual abiding to imposed truths, and incompetence to produce, create, or debate knowledge of any kind. Since vocational curricula emphasises the pragmatic aspect of the careers students are being trained into, a relevant and useful pedagogical programme of studies for those students, then, should concentrate its literature syllabus on textual reading, on creative writing, and reading and literary theories, rather than on literary history, the use of which can only be rather limited for their teaching.

### **Homer School**

Situated in the city centre in a historical building founded in 1835, Homer School is one of the most traditional secondary schools in the State, and it concentrates on an academically-oriented - rather than vocational - curriculum. At the centre of pedagogical politics, Homer School has been renowned for its teaching staff, marked with the reputation of seriousness and competence, while Homer School's students used to have an above average performance in *vestibular* exams for the public universities. At the time of this research, Homer was suffering the same financial limits imposed on other State schools by the reduction of public investment on education. In spite of the external grandeur and beauty, as the school is part of the city's Old Quarter, classrooms were derelict, with broken ceiling fans, old and uncomfortable desks, and gratified walls.

Relations were complicated by the fact that at Homer School there had been no literature co-ordinator for the past ten years, and teachers in each of the three shifts did whatever they believed in, or felt capable of, without common accordance with colleagues in the other shifts. Thus, the morning students had a textbook adopted, whereas the divided afternoon groups had the literature course based upon handouts produced by some teachers, in isolated initiatives; there was neither book or handout in the evening shift, whose teachers brought sparse texts for reading and analysis. It is still a significant indicator of the socio-economic

differences among the clientele attending the school in the different schedules, as well as of the interference of political partisan attitudes in educational affairs. According to the co-ordinator, it was truly a *three-in-one school*, depending on the shift schedule, with the school direction's consent. The syllabus overtly indicated that teachers were supposed to teach literary periods, dates, names and characteristics, adding a few extra readers and stimulating reading habits in their students: at least five novels were set for the exams. What seemed to have become the current and alarming practice was for students, then, to go through the novels extracts found in the adopted textbooks, to get the gist of those works, but without really reading any in their entirety. What can texts do unless they are read?

Having participated in meetings with literature teachers in the morning and afternoon shifts, I could notice that teachers apparently resented the head's pedagogical-political interference; at the end of the reunion they had not yet agreed to use either textbooks or purpose-made hand-outs. There seemed to be different 'realities' and social groups at Homer School, and communication was not always easy. I was told that all classes had elected language and literature teachers as their representatives, because they often took students on outings, to free theatre performances, etc., consequently being the ones students went to when in trouble.

There were eleven literature teachers in the morning shift, eight in the afternoon and five in the evening, all working part-time, as there is no provision for full-time employment in the State secondary system. In the first afternoon meeting I was told by Beth, one of the literature teachers, that a group of active teachers had started a pre-examination course at Homer School years before, using exam-training methods and contents similar to those found in the private secondary schools, which consisted of equipping students for the exams mostly through workshops. Some colleagues complained that, on exam training students, those teachers were not 'forming' their academic minds, besides taking personal advantage of the flexible schedule. An inspection from the State secretariat followed, the group was politically pressured and eventually had to stop.

The afternoon teachers present at the co-ordination meeting seemed a more critical and active group. After several department meetings, consensus was not reached, and Almir, the newly installed co-ordinator, handed out copies of the prescribed syllabus for each level in 1995, making suggestions based on his own

practice, which most teachers rejected as too pragmatic and shallow, 'lacking both a political posture and theoretical support'.

The succinct text of the Homer School syllabus read:

- . year One: literary genres, styles, Troubadours, Humanism, Classicism, Informative literature, Jesuit literature, Baroque and Neo-Classicism;
  - . year Two: Baroque, Renaissance, Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism & Parnassianism, Pre-Modernism, all given within set dates, definitions and characteristics (N.B. Time will allow little chance to experience the differences in textual exemplification);
  - . year Three: Brazilian Pre-Modernism, Avant-garde, Brazilian Modernism, tendencies of Brazilian contemporary poetry and prose, ending with Modernism in Portugal.
- Note: *given the limited time for the extensive program, extra readings are not recommended, specially novels.*

### ***Teachers' habitus***

The lessons I observed with three teachers were all in year three classes (six lessons in different groups of Almir's students, four in Martha's, both in the morning shift, and two with Beth, in the afternoon). I was introduced in a friendly manner to the students, who were urged by Martha and Beth to ask me questions, if they so wished. There were considerable differences between contents, as well as between teaching styles and strategies. Almir, for instance, made use of sparse texts to teach textual interpretation, mixing communication theory with syntactic analysis, figures of speech and linguistics, without any obvious connection between texts and specific input, presented in an apparently generalised and superficial way. Textual analysis was done through pairs of oppositional appreciation, such as 'like/dislike, tiring/absorbing, modern/traditional, content/form'. Martha's lessons followed the textbook, which she did in detail, in close connection with the syllabus. She talked about the characteristics of 19th century prose (Realism, Naturalism) and poetry (Parnassianism). Her planning seemed limited to the information contained in the textbook, as became evident when a student disagreed with one of the answers to a set of comprehension questions found in the textbook, leaving Martha lost and confused, without being able to resort to other authors or theories and provide information about the topic, which could stimulate a discussion and raise other points. Martha treated literature as a fixed layering of information, each period and genre depending on the acquisition of knowledge

about the preceding one. In that way, when she tried to introduce literary Realism to one of her classes, she began by revising students' information about Romanticism; some students said they had not yet studied romantic prose, just poetry, and Martha, flustered and embarrassed, turned to me to say 'how can I, then, teach Realism if they do not know Romanticism? What shall I do now?'.

Beth's afternoon classes were studying Romantic poetry, and she used a modern poem to illustrate the characteristics of Romanticism, while also raising the issue of 'the limits of the work of art as opposed to technical skills'. I think it is important to quote the poem Beth used, which gives an idea of her habitus.

*Erro de Português* ('Portuguese error'), by Oswald de Andrade.

<i>Quando o português chegou</i>	<i>(When the Portuguese arrived</i>
<i>Debaixo de uma bacia chuva</i>	<i>Under pouring rain</i>
<i>Vestiu o índio</i>	<i>They dressed up the Indians</i>
<i>Que pena!</i>	<i>What a pity!</i>
<i>Fosse uma manhã de sol</i>	<i>Were it a sunny morning</i>
<i>O índio tinha despidido</i>	<i>The Indians would have undressed</i>
<i>o português.</i>	<i>the Portuguese.)</i>

Martha and Almir said they came from working-class backgrounds, becoming the first in their respective families to enter university. He was in his early fifties, she in her early forties. Both seemed insecure about their roles and their knowledge of literary matters, and while Almir turned to language studies, an area in which he apparently felt more knowledgeable, Martha allowed herself no deviation from the official source of knowledge, the textbook. Beth had a middle-class upbringing in a family which she defined as politically active before the military *coup d'état*. Her lessons were founded on a variety of sub-themes which led to the main topic for study, instead of reading to the class the listed characteristics of the Romantic period and related genres. As such, she had chosen a modern poem, instead of a romantic one, to discuss the permanence of characteristics throughout different literary times. Although Beth defined herself as academically insecure, led on pedagogically by *fear* of failing her students, she seemed to hold a wider range of literary and pedagogical resources than average teachers, certainly wider than Martha's and Almir's. What appeared to me as the motivating factor in her successful teaching practice, according to her students' opinions, was the combination of her acknowledged political commitment to



education, with her own search (or *thirst*, as she described it) for knowledge. This was reinforced by her being a published author of pedagogical textbooks of literature and language, adopted in some other schools for learning support.

Their modes of teaching and classroom strategies helped clarify their habitus. Thus, Almir treated students as passive learners, believing that lots of input presented in accelerated form would 'avoid their talking, interrupting the lesson, and creating disciplinary problems'. In a very fast pace, he went from one topic to another, inserting a few rude jokes in order to 'bring some fun to the lesson', while also uttering idiosyncrasies such as 'one teacher is worth forty students', 'teachers are the ones who know all the answers', etc. Almir seemed to treat his students as malleable, knowable objects whose voices would go unheard.<sup>18</sup> Coming from a working-class family from one of the peripheral suburbs, he graduated in Letters in 1969, but still seemed to count on what he had learned at university, allied to his teaching experience, as his educational perspective and source of teaching resources. As described in section A of this chapter, the Letters curriculum in Brazil combined Sassurean linguistics with communication theory as the basis for literary interpretation and textual understanding. As such, Almir described to me what he believed to be the role of literature at school: a contextual background for the teaching of language grammar (syntax, morphology, and etymology).

On the other hand, Martha's strategy consisted of saying open-ended sentences, raising the pitch of her voice interrogatively, waiting for students to complete the last word. She explained things clearly, with lots of examples, making links between texts, periods and genres, and spoon-feeding her students. She lectured about 'the search for perfection and beauty in Parnassian poetry', about the Parnassian view of women, love, man and God, doing all the talking herself, without students interrupting her. Both classes viewed were sleepily silent, passively following the reading; there was no interchange, no exchange of opinions. At the interview, Martha emphasised that she was 'doing her best, as a friendly, nice and sympathetic teacher', for whom teaching is *an act of motherly*

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<sup>18</sup> Mimi Orner 'Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice in "Liberatory" Education: A Feminist Post-structuralist Perspective', in Luke & Gore (1992), op cit., p 82. She opposes the view and treatment of students as 'malleable, knowable objects', to that as complex, contradictory subjects, a central concept in critical pedagogy.

*love*, and evidently little political engagement. Above all she said to value her students' love for her, as an exchange for her personal commitment to them, for which she often received tokens of their love in the form of appraisal, gifts and affection. As Walkerdine writes, Martha seemed to believe that 'it is love which will win the day', trapped in a concept of nurturance aiming at freeing each little individual in an idealist dream.<sup>19</sup>

The three teachers expressed their frustration at the low salaries, the lack of working facilities at State schools in general, such as no ancillary staff to type or print texts for them, allied to scarce material resources in general. Differently from other teachers interviewed but not viewed at Homer, who were pedagogically relieved to find that the middle classes were returning to the public schools, bringing with them 'a higher cultural level' which facilitates their pedagogical practice, Almir found that the newly arrived middle-class students were too demanding, and tended to question 'his authority' as their teacher. He seemed to feel easier by teaching a predominantly working-class clientele, either because their values were not dissimilar to his own, or because they offered less overt criticism to his teaching style. Also Martha appeared to feel threatened by the 'higher knowledge' those new students, coming from 'good, private schools' were bringing with them. Above all, she felt humiliated by their financial capability, at a time when she was experiencing extreme hardship, due to teachers' low salaries, and her husband's redundancy.

Although only Beth mentioned her *fear*, it was possible to understand that fear was the motor of both Almir's and Martha's strategies. Albeit Almir complained of his students' literary and linguistic 'ignorance', he feared not being able to deal with discipline problems, using his own voice as a controlling mechanism of imposing control. Martha's fear was circled by her intellectual self-consciousness, her poverty, her betrayal of the capitalist dream of socio-economic ascension through education. As Almir used his voice, Martha used her affection, establishing with students an emotional link which might prevent them from testing her knowledge, behaving inadequately, or demanding too much of her.

Among the teachers interviewed, Marian looked at literature education as a permanent process of cultural comparison between old and modern texts, because

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<sup>19</sup> V. Walkerdine (1992) op cit., p 16

'life is dynamic'; Judy, a teacher of language and literature who was then currently working as one of the librarians in the morning, also commented upon literary contents and proposed pedagogical practices founded on interactive strategies, on developing the senses, emotions and thoughts in order to evolve towards the appreciation of literature. However, she acknowledged that students only took literature because it was a compulsory subject. Martha was less than critical of the syllabuses and official proposals for literature education; as her strategical aim was to develop an affective relationship with her students, in order to guarantee their interest and, above all, their approval of her, rather than to empower them through literary knowledge, she offered a somewhat superficial view of teaching-learning issues.

There could be seen among Homer School literature teachers and taught an incorporation of the recently acquired political discourse directed to the working classes. The left-wing jargon emphasising freedom of speech, of thought, and basic democratic rights, while showing the fallibility of hegemonic power, was present in most of the talks, as a large and healthy influence upon urban secondary State-school students, who have reached an academic stand beyond the majority of the Brazilian population, and who are usually more aware of their socio-political possibilities and imposed cultural limits. However, schools have not followed the change of times. Contents remained uncritically static, and practices in general carried alongside them a vast array of disenfranchising characteristics, despite the theoretical contribution of many scholars and educationists settled inside universities.

Beth talked about curriculum changes, and acknowledged the importance of Semiotics as theoretical foundation for the development of reader-text relationships from literary contexts, letting her political commitment appear throughout her pedagogical discourse (*'with the coup, my family was chased, there was a permanent smell of fear at home, of censored telephone calls'*). Despite the remarkably aware and engaged discourse, Beth also expected her students to 'copy everything into their copybooks'. Her criticism of her colleagues was centred on their lack of dedication, love and affective engagement, and she believed that having better formed teachers was a necessary ground on which to build more rewarding and meaningful pedagogies.

Teachers from Homer School represented personal patterns of teaching practices, corresponding to their habitus, their personal and academic backgrounds, and were strongly determined by their political commitments. Almir's discourse and practice denied the demand for democratic relations towards empowering students; Martha combined a deficient academic training with a motherly attitude which would support her practice with an affective link, without necessarily implying an afferent transaction: the multiplicity of powers to be found in literature cannot be developed without confrontation, without extending the intellectual limits, since lack of information limits students' ability either to participate in the experience offered by the text or to fit the experience into some rational structure of ideas<sup>20</sup>; and Beth felt entrapped in the self-critical analysis of her own action, without judging herself able to go forward. As such, any attempt to create teaching stereotypes out of Almir, Martha or Beth would be unrealistic and inaccurate.

### *Modes of learning*

The classes observed with the three teachers at Homer ranged between having twenty-six and forty-two students, all at year three, their last year of schooling before going through the entrance examinations to university. There was a much larger number of female students<sup>21</sup>, and the socio-economic composition, according to the teachers, was of between 60 and 70% of middle-class students, coming from private schools, and 30 to 40% of working-class origin. However, the absolute majority lived in distant suburbs, having to commute to school. The fact that they were travelling to the inner-city to study was, for some, a sign of social ascension itself, whereas for others it was the only possible alternative of getting good education, given the extremely limited offer of secondary schools in their local boroughs.

I interviewed at Homer three classes of students in the morning and two in the afternoon. Contrarily to what teachers had said, they did not describe themselves as middle class, and in fact acknowledged their own status as underprivileged, at a disadvantage in the race for free university places. Specially in

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<sup>20</sup> This point is explored by L. Rosenblatt (1970) *Literature as Exploration*, London: Heinemann. 'Emotion and reason', p 241

<sup>21</sup> In Almir's classes there were 24 students (15 female), 36 students (21 female), 22 students (50% female). In Martha's, 42 students (27 female), 30 students (21 female), and in Beth's afternoon classes, 25 (21 female) and 31 (20 female).

the afternoon, many had morning jobs, and counted on their education as the only possibility of social ascension. The discrepancy between what teachers perceived and students' self socio-economic description is complex, because in Brazil social layering is related almost exclusively to spending power. As those students now attending State schools were capable of acquiring books, therefore situated above poverty line, teachers tended to over-estimate their buying power, classifying them as economically privileged. Aged seventeen to twenty at year three, the predominantly non-white students at Homer very much impressed me for their level of political consciousness.

In Almir's class, for instance, there were demands for more organised contents, and more active participation other than simply answering teacher's questions. A student related the case of a literature teacher she had had, who 'made difficult things sound simple', who 'talked to us', and 'allowed us to ask questions'. Another complained about the imposed silence in *some* teachers' classes, where students were 'always wrong, no matter what they said'. And still a third complained about the disrespectful treatment given by some teachers, who 'refused to answer my questions, saying that they were stupid ones'. Whereas issues were located in the realm of interactive relations in the classroom, it can be perceived that students' demands presented a combination of methodological, strategic and conceptual matters. They rejected the superficiality of non-problematized contents, and were not happy with 'simply copying things onto their notebooks'. Their views of literature education extended to reading and textual powers, as stated by one of the students, who said that 'an illiterate person is next to nothing, *they* can do whatever they want with him'. And still, 'reading opens up one's minds', and 'literature helps you to understand the things of your own country, even current politics'.

Martha's students were passively quiet throughout the lessons viewed, although the first group was supposed to be the 'strongest' of Homer's year-three classes, with the students who had achieved the highest number of points in the *pre-selective* tests. While she recited period's characteristics, some students made notes, others dozed, and their body language expressed the utter boredom of that pedagogical exercise. As Martha checked the answers to a comprehension exercise from the textbook, one black female student disagreed with the answer given by

her, read from the textbook. Urged by her classmates, she raised her hand, and questioned the author's interpretation of a poem, as she wanted to know 'what gave him the certainty of his viewpoint over the poet's intentions'. She very clearly made the distinction between the poet's text and the textbook authors' explanation, saying that *they propose an analysis of the poem, which may not necessarily correspond to the poet's intention*. Martha was unable to satisfy the student's query, in embarrassed frustration.

Beth's students were not refrained by either *love* or *voice*, and during her lessons expressed their lack of interest in literature, given the previous experiences in years one and two, with 'mere food for memory' in insipid and irrelevant form. One student said she 'only attended literature classes because she had to', and to Beth's suggestion that curriculum planners should ideally replace the present programme with 'literature as a space for the development of sensibility, emotion, and exchange', students heartily agreed with her<sup>22</sup>, except for one who suggested more biographic data should be included, as she only enjoyed 'studying gossip about writers'. Unanimously, students in both classes said that if literature lessons were interesting they'd probably enjoy the discipline. It was the second group interviewed, however, who provided the most cogent arguments in the debate about the literature curriculum, reflecting their views of the needed political changes in Brazilian society.

They raised issues such as the canon, which could only become socio-culturally and politically relevant if it included authors and texts dealing with the recent political events in the country. Many questioned the meaning of keeping in the programme Portuguese texts of medieval literature, as well as Jesuits' 16th-century documents, the worth of which they found to lie in their historical value only. A male student who intended to take Philosophy at university talked about contemporary Brazilian literature, drawing a parallel between culture, social events and literary texts, while regretting that the present state of affairs in public education would certainly interfere in his academic projects. Still in this same class a female student, who had a morning job at a nursery school, was trying to connect Paulo Freire's thoughts, with which she had become acquainted at work in order to

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<sup>22</sup> This issue deserves careful analysis. If literature education is a representation of societies, it would probably require many deeper social changes before Beth's project could be put into practice at school level. I will return to this point later.

better understand children's individual and social needs using children literature, with the curriculum State secondary schools provided her and other students, based on the denial of true discussion and problematization, and settled on a pedagogy of irrelevance and silence.

### **Springhill**

It was founded in the sixties, as the only full-time primary and secondary school at Guavatown providing experimental methods and an alternative pedagogy, in a modern purpose-built building, situated at the city centre, almost across the street from Homer School. Although officially recognised as a non-profit establishment, which exempts it from most taxes, Springhill has always catered for the upper middle classes, charging high fees, while keeping a small percentage of scholarships for less wealthy pupils. It provides a clear representation of the middle-class layer of Brazilian society, with a predominance of white pupils whose values are settled on overt buying power demonstration. I was acquainted with the freer environment and their so-called experimental philosophy; therefore, before observing literature classes, I was expecting a different ambience from what I found at Figtree and at Homer. However, instead of twenty-five students per air-conditioned classroom as I had known, each class now had up to forty students, lined up in rows, coping with the summer heat with ceiling fans and open windows, and the interference of a lot of street noise.

Literature classes could hardly be considered experimental, with textbook information dominating the scenario, as in the other schools viewed, although department meetings attempted to be occasions for discussions over contents and methods. As in this study I tried to concentrate on contents and uses, rather than on stated objectives, I have concluded that, despite the declaration of intentions, the main differences between Springhill and Homer, as non-vocational inner-city secondary schools, lay in the students' class values and attitudes, each school's physical facilities, and teachers' salaries. At Springhill, the carefully selected, well-paid teachers exhibited a high intellectual profile, allied to unquestionable dedication to their subjects, students, and timetables; punctuality and assiduity remain a must in private schools, contrary to the laxity often found at many State schools in Rio.

At Springhill, the syllabus was handed out in a more extensive and detailed form, including basic pedagogical and philosophical considerations. It brief, it said:

- a. Fundamentals, in which objectives and activities recommended for the course are justified, 'to reflect a permanent search resulting from the questioning of the literary phenomenon, and its function in secondary schooling'. (The co-ordinator explained that the chronological arrangement did not aim to privilege a determinist, historical treatment of literature, but rather to support the comprehension of the National literary process, situating each author and work in interaction with their socio-cultural context);
- b. Methodology, opting for a comparative study of contemporary texts;
- c. General Objectives, such as to recognise not only literature as maximum expressive potentiality of language use, but also Brazilian literature as an element of production, conservation and transmission of Brazilian culture; to identify Brazilian literature as an element of nationality, to be related to national and international settings; to identify in literary periods basic human expression as well as to amplify the cultural horizon and vital experience through the development of reading habits and deepening of literary knowledge;
- d. Contents:  
 year One - basic concepts such as literary art, literary genres, Portuguese Troubadours, Portuguese Humanism and finally, informative Literature about Brazil;  
 year Two - Baroque, Renaissance, Romantic poetry and Romantic prose;  
 year Three - Realism and Naturalism, Parnassianism, Symbolism, Pre-Modernism, phases 1 and 2 of Modernism, post-modernism, and contemporary productions.

Relations between teachers and students were very informal and friendly, and Springhill's students have often exhibited a striking self-confident posture. They are known to develop a strong attachment to the school, due to its non-authoritarian atmosphere. Classes there start, as usual in Brazil, at 7 in the morning, with one twenty-minute interval in mid-morning, a 60-minute lunch break, with classes resuming at 1.30 till 3.45. Twice a week students have elective courses in the afternoon, which can be chosen from a wide selection (photography, theatre, music, choir, dancing, all sorts of sports, etc.), while teachers hold department meetings or general assemblies.

At Springhill, each group had two literature sessions per week, plus six language lessons and occasional composition workshops. The classes observed had a balance between the number of male and female students<sup>23</sup>, sitting in rows. The

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<sup>23</sup> Lucy's observed classes had 36 students (17 female, two black), 39 (20 female, all white), and Anne's had 40 students (21 female, all white), and 39 (19 female, all white).



age average was seventeen, at year three. There seemed to be less variation in the classroom practice paradigms there: Anne and Lucy followed a similar pattern of lecturing about the contents found in text books, as oral-aural stimulation of students' memories, before getting down to read the same contents, and do the comprehension-check exercises on the same textbooks. To this, they added extra readers, poems, chronicles, short stories, or cuttings from newspapers, in order to expand students' reading experience, as well as to give them some 'food for thought' as preparation for the *redação* exams. All of the lessons observed at Springhill were entirely based on historical-biographical information surrounding literature, in an even more radical manner than at Figtree or Homer School, a fact that denied its publicised posture of experimentation, as well as the general objectives beautifully stated in the syllabus. Considering that middle-class parental pressure for socio-academic success plays a much stronger role than the school's basic progressive philosophy, literature education was imposed strict socio-cultural constraints, despite teachers' possible competence and creativity. However, those constraints were neutralised, or compensated, by the high salaries paid. As acknowledged by the co-ordinator of *vestibular* exams interviewed, from one of Rio's four Federal universities, 'secondary schools give no general education, they only aim to make students pass the exams'.

The opinions voiced by the three teachers at Springhill were, as a whole, supported by evidence from their teaching in the State system. Archie, for example, whom I only interviewed, was struggling between following the syllabus with his evening-shift working-class students at Homer School, for whom studying was the third shift of a day's work, and attending to what he considering their immediate needs, that is, teaching them how to produce mundane texts (Kress, 1995) such as commercial letters, curricula vitae, memoranda, etc. However, when Archie led a discussion with his students at Homer about the understanding of ideology as a sub-conscious practice, preparing the ground before introducing literary concepts, he confessed he had been surprised by the disclosure of a great deal of social prejudice among them as well<sup>24</sup>. By and large, his freedom to use classroom time for general conversation was much larger at Homer School than at Springhill,

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<sup>24</sup> The absorption of hegemonic values by the oppressed/the colonised has been analysed by Freire, Said, Bhabha, among others.

where academic targets must be achieved, and pedagogical actions were surveyed by direction, co-ordination, parents, and students themselves.

Anne's and Lucy's main complaints were situated in the macro policy-making sphere: they wished the programme of studies to be less broad, and the provision for literature lessons more generous. Lucy also compared the political views of her middle-class students there with those of her State school students, to conclude that Springhill students presented a strictly one-sided view of social problems, for instance blaming crime and violence on poverty, but suggesting capital punishment for criminals as the ultimate solution for society's illnesses.

To my question 'what would the ideal literature teaching situation be', Lucy, interviewed at the Springhill staff room, said that she would like to be able to make literature more appealing to the senses, to make students aware that it is a form of art as well as the expression of the culture of given people. She would like to have an initial year of literary literacy based on reader-response approaches, with the basic twofold aim of developing personal responses with a recognition of cultural issues: a culturally committed reading of literary texts. On the other hand, Anne complained about the lack of literature education materials, and acknowledged the difficulty of putting theories to practice, both because of time constraints, and of students' resistance to reading.

### *Pedagogical practices*

There were three literature teachers at Springhill, one for each year of secondary school. I observed six lessons at year two with Anne, and six at year three with Lucy, who was also the literature co-ordinator. Neither teacher introduced me to their classes. Therefore, not officially present, I was not acknowledged by the students, who remained distant and cold throughout my three weeks' viewing. Anne and Lucy also had public jobs, Lucy at a State school, Anne at a Federal secondary school. Lucy confided that she was seriously considering asking for dismissal ('exoneration') from her State job, because of the 'high level of frustration' she suffered with the low salary, the lack of material resources, and the 'conceptual differences' among her State colleagues. Anne's situation was easier, because the salary she got at the Federal school was reasonable, and there were plenty of facilities teachers could count on there.

Both Lucy and Anne came from highly literate homes, with professional middle-class parents who valued reading for their cultural and intellectual upbringing. Anne had tried a degree in Psychology, but changed to Letters after the second year, because she discovered that she really enjoyed teaching and 'getting involved with literature'. After graduating, she did a post-graduate *lato-sensu* course on literature<sup>25</sup>. Defining herself as a 'very demanding teacher', Anne recognised the need for theoretical support in literature education. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that given the large programme of study and the reduced number of weekly lessons, teachers had to rely on textbooks for their lesson planning, which also made it possible for students to learn on their own if they so wished. Arguing that 'teachers don't get paid to work extra hours at home', when asked about students' boredom, she blamed it on their laziness and lack of reading interest. Anne's lessons followed the commonly found routine of reading from the textbook, or lecturing about the contents of the book, setting comprehension questions, and checking them after some time.

Lucy's habitus was not dissimilar from Anne's, although her posture was more overtly political. Coming from a family of renowned literature and language teachers, Lucy also had a degree in Letters, and a *lato-sensu* post-graduate course in Brazilian literature. Accumulating two functions at Springhill, Lucy felt she did not need the security of a State job anymore, and judged her request for dismissal as a political act. Despite the fact that Lucy apparently seemed quite critical of public education, and worked at a progressive school, very little experimentation was observed in her lessons. She read or lectured from the textbook, the same used at Homer in the morning, summarising paragraphs and explaining textual 'difficulties', without taking any risks: the tight timetable allowed little else than 'covering' the syllabus, therefore her lessons offered little critical discussion, or interactive approaches.

Questions were asked and answered by the teachers themselves, supported by the textbook's footnotes, which felt like a waste of time and of students' energy, spoon-fed towards passivity. By seeing Anne's and Lucy's emphasis on

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<sup>25</sup> The Brazilian system comprises two kinds of post-graduate studies: *lato sensu* are non-research courses, requiring either 240 or 360 hours of taught studies. And *strictu sensu*, Masters and Doctorate, both requiring a combination of taught and research courses. The time limit for a master's degree is a minimum of two years full-time studying, and in fact it corresponds to the M Phil in England.

possible questions, texts and themes for the exams, it was clear that Springhill had become like any other secondary school which prepared students for *vestibular* exams, especially those catering for a middle-class clientele. Archie's practice seemed slightly different, based on more discussion and awareness raising, 'a strategy only possible at year one, with the menace of exams still far away'.

While Anne considered the amount of input in a reduced timetable the main problem in her practice as a literature teacher, Lucy raised an issue which had been mentioned by other teachers, at State schools. She linked the lack of reading skills, of literary knowledge, and interest, to the fact that hers were 'Third-World students', and that was her main problem.

### **To sum up**

More similarities were found in literature education practices between Homer School, a State school, and Springhill, than between Homer and Figtree, both in the State jurisdiction, but with different academic orientations. At Homer and Springhill, emphasis was placed on delivering the programme, despite the individual variations allowed at some State schools, where control of practices was little enforced. Whereas the use of a textbook simplified teaching practices and limited teachers' creativity, on the other hand it also made students less dependent on teachers as the sole source of learning data as required for academic success. However, to use textbooks as the only source of factual information and literary knowledge seemed to cause a weakening of investigation interests and limits, while also blocking intellectual curiosity. Although not always were students found to be silenced by overt authoritarian strategies, they were pressurised into passivity by time constraints, by a positivistic programme, and by the strong socio-cultural expectation of passing the exams.

Still in the realm of literary contents, the least consistent literary practices were found at Figtree, where didactic subjects were most valued by the students. In general, what was found to be the unifying element in literature education was the mere distribution to teachers of a basic programme of studies, divided into the three years of secondary schooling.

Strategies, however, seemed a more complex issue to determine and classify. Apart from Springhill, classroom approaches basically depended on

individual characteristics, habitus, political commitment, technical competence. At Homer, teaching styles ranged from old-fashioned authoritarianism to the motherly use of love, affection and emotion to substitute for a patchy professional training, and still to intense political commitment, literary involvement and vibrating rapport with literature and with students. Driven by different central motives (defensive self-consciousness, refusal of political acknowledgement, fear of failure), those teachers worked independently of departmental guidance, as seen.

At Figtree School, departmental orientation exerted a more controlled guidance of teachers' work, with a textbook adopted for all classes, and weekly meetings scheduled for the exchange of proposals, difficulties and dilemmas; however, politico-economic issues have taken over pedagogical matters for obvious reasons. In fact, atrociously low salaries have provoked in State teachers a bitter recognition of their low social worth, reflecting on their sometimes below-average performance before their classes. When survival is at peril, little stamina is left for problematization of cultural, social, literary-pedagogical issues, and the system of oppression and inequalities, once again, wins the day.

The use of literary textbooks, per se, does not seem to offer any guarantee of academic success or effective problematization of contents. More than teaching modes, socio-economic class distinctions, well represented in teachers' salaries and material resources, affect learning modes and the democratisation of social, cultural, political and economic opportunities in Brazilian literature classrooms.

Literature education in Brazilian secondary schools, thus, represents a society with overt, established social, economic, and political differences, officially neutralised by an explicit curriculum of pseudo-equality of opportunities and unattainable objectivity.

## CHAPTER THREE: Entering the English System

The student who has not read most of the Bible has already handicapped himself severely for understanding English literature.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I attempt to provide the reader with an account of my entering the English school system, initially through reading experience, and later by personal viewing of classes. It has not been my intention to produce an account of the history of literature education in England, which is not the objective of this project, and which would require the expertise of a historian, which I lack. However, it seems relevant to bring some reflection on the origins of some of the practices currently met, which may then be better understood.

### ***SECTION A - Learning about Englishness***

In order to situate myself within the classroom practices of literature education before entering them for observation, I felt it necessary to enquire about its framework, from a number of authors. I will attempt to analyse the paradigms presented by those writers, to be checked against my own findings through the viewing and interviewing process.

Easthope and McGowan write that the study of literary texts in schools in England is a recent innovation, only established after the 1930s, and which developed for at least two reasons: the decline of the Christian religion, 'which seemed to leave people without a proper sense of value', to be hopefully acquired through the study of great literature; and the explosion of mass media, which was causing literature to be ignored. Thus, in order to keep it alive, literature should be seriously taught, with a selective canon of poems, plays and novels.<sup>2</sup>

Exton writes that

Much teaching of literature in schools suffers from a double handicap. On the one hand, it exists within an educational framework which is rigidly hierarchical in countless ways. On the other hand, it operates within that English tradition which penetrates all aspects of cultural life in this country: namely, a firm separation of creation from criticism, of practice from theory.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Boulton (1980) *The Anatomy of Literary Studies*, pp 187-8. Her focus is on undergraduates.

<sup>2</sup> Antony Easthope & Kate McGowan (eds. (1996) *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, p 1

<sup>3</sup> Richard Exton 'The Language of Literature', in Victor Lee (ed.) (1987) *English Literature in Schools*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, p 313.

In Exton's and in various other texts I found mention of an inheritance which still characterises literature education in English schools, and which mediates the reading, not often the studying, of literature, a crucial difference since there is an examination system confirming, imposing and reflecting the conceptual and cultural assumptions built into the system: according to Exton, there is a giant intrinsic contradiction in the valuation of 'creativity' in an education hierarchy based on 'criticism'. He aims for a change of position from the anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical which he believes to characterise much of British cultural life, towards an attempt to 'build on the knowledge students bring to the literature classroom in order to combat some of the mystifying rhetoric surrounding the discipline' (p 319).

### Foundation and phases of criticism

Dixon and Stratta seem to agree with Exton, and go further in their criticism of the examination system, questioning the expectation/ expectancy of definitive readings of literature from teenagers: 'reading literature is problematic, subject to individual, cultural and historical change'<sup>4</sup>, and school students are asked to take on the university role of 'critical' analysis. Protherough also describes literature education as a problematic subject of studies which by its nature merges imperceptibly into other disciplines, lacking consensus about its boundaries. It is distinct from most other academic disciplines as it is not justified by direct practical and professional connections: 'it may produce teachers and writers, but the purpose of the study is not primarily vocational'.<sup>5</sup> Most other subjects of studies relate to students in an essentially rational and analytic form; literature studies bring the cognitive and the affective bound up together, which can become a complicating factor in the determination of its *point*.

To Protherough and Atkinsons, English teachers as a separate, identifiable group, have not existed for long, even after English was made a compulsory subject by the 1904 Regulation.<sup>6</sup> Three overlapping phases are pointed by the

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<sup>4</sup> John Dixon and Leslie Stratta 'Unlocking Mind-Forg'd Manacles?' in V. Lee (ed.)(1987), op cit., p 397

<sup>5</sup> Robert Protherough (1986) *Teaching Literature for Examinations*, p 3

<sup>6</sup> Robert Protherough & Judith Atkinson (1994) 'Shaping the Image of an English Teacher' in Susan Brindley (ed.) *Teaching English*, p 5

authors, after universal compulsory education and curricular specialisation at secondary level: there was a concern for the 'discrete skills of English', followed by the establishing of English as a separate subject, and then the appointment of English teachers. Not until the 1920s would graduate English teachers begin to emerge as a category, with the subject still carrying a low status image. Protherough & Atkinson describe 'what sort of animal' an English teacher is, by recalling the recommendations found in the 1921 Newbolt Report, according to which English teachers must have: a 'literary training' not necessarily acquired at degree courses; a 'range of personal qualities'; an 'ability to unlock the creative potential of children', a 'social concern for all kinds of children', and 'expertise in language'. They should have no concern with vocational or utilitarian training, as their chief concern should be 'the changing of lives'; in fact, they account that the ideal teacher was born, not made, which explains why formation counted little (pp 9-10).

From what most writers describe, there seems to have been little substantial change from 1921 to the present requirements for teachers of English literature:

Because there is no generally agreed body of subject matter, the boundaries of the subject are notoriously unclear and cannot be neatly defined.<sup>7</sup>

Dixon<sup>8</sup> analyses three models in the teaching of English (language and literature), while attempting to establish a method of definition. The first is the *skill* model (mainly concerned with initial literacy); the second is founded on *cultural heritage* ('the need for a civilizing and socially unifying content'); and the third and current model addresses *personal growth* (the learning processes related to its meaning to the individual). Dixon believes that the second and third models are still in practice in literature classrooms of different levels; the former is based on Matthew Arnold's belief that great literature offers a criticism of life, with a stress on culture as a *given*, ignoring pupils' cultural knowledge; the latter, by and large influenced by progressive theories of education, tends to over-simplification in its pursuit of self-expression, and is not centrally representative of sixth-form literature students, the focus of my own study here.

Rex Gibson describes four major approaches to literature education, all practised at university and represented differently in the school teaching of

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<sup>7</sup> Protherough & Atkinson (1994), op cit., p 11

<sup>8</sup> John Dixon 'A Method of Definition', in Lee (ed.) (1987), op cit., pp. 191-201



literature: the first is based on the *scholarship on texts*, consisting of 'patient, scrupulous research' attempting to establish the fidelity of original texts; the second is *the human encounter with literature, the response to the text*, concerned with how the individual responds to a poem or other work of literary art, morally and in relation to his/her sensibility as a reader. Its key words are 'authenticity', 'sincerity', 'critical awareness'; theories are despised for they interfere between text and reader. Gibson points to this as the most powerful influence on English studies. The third approach, usually referred to as sociological/historical, proposes the study of literature in order to identify 'its role and function in society', to learn about society through literature, whose functional aim is to serve and improve society. The fourth approach is concerned with the internal mechanisms and systems of literature, and Gibson indicates as its alternative form *literary structuralism*<sup>9</sup>.

David Shayer writes that what is disturbing in the history of literature education in England is 'the extent to which (teaching) practices have been established for reasons often only tenuously connected with well thought out English theory, and have then assumed a permanence generation after generation which is seemingly unshakeable'<sup>10</sup>. He explains his point by describing what he considers the great fallacies permeating the teaching of English this century, some of them still in practice at schools.<sup>11</sup> He also indicates that 'sixth-form English was clearly meant to involve spectacularly extensive reading, though one can only conclude that pupils merely learnt very little about a great deal' (p. 58).

In various texts analysing the history and the pedagogy of literature as a subject of studies, there can be found references to the emphasis placed by educators in general on heritage, middle-class values and culture, the implications of which seem to complicate matters in multicultural, multiethnic classrooms peopled with students from different social stands.

<sup>9</sup> Rex Gibson 'Structuralism and Literature' in Lee (ed.) (1987) op cit., pp 231 - 234

<sup>10</sup> David Shayer (1972) *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900-1970*, Introduction, p 2

<sup>11</sup> Shayer describes the 'classical fallacy' (literary study through methods transferred from the classics), the Old English fallacy (Old and Middle English studied in order to bring respectability to the discipline), the composition and the imitative fallacy (pupils were to imitate, copy or reproduce models), the moral fallacy (literature as a means of purveying moral lessons to 'little adults'), the correlation and subject status (English merged with geography or history by 'groupings') and the grammar and the content fallacy (English must be academic, examinable and respectable through its body of grammatical facts: a 'mental trainer').

Gribble analyses, among other issues, the denial of pleasure in studying literature; he finds that the proponents of a tough and rigorous education are suspicious of literature both because *how can it be educative and be fun?*<sup>12</sup> and also because literature is 'morally dangerous', given the kinds of feeling literary works evoke. Another central issue in his book deals with the resistance that any attempts to suggest that literary criticism becomes part of literature education in schools meets from teachers, aestheticians and philosophers of education; the sort of critical discussion found in universities is considered inadequate for school use because 'it is said to interfere with the immediate pleasure of reading and thus with the development of a wide acquaintance with literature and a taste for reading it' (p 32). As teachers are uncertain about the point of 'critical analysis', they present it to students in a general perspective of little importance and interest.

[...] literary criticism is that form of discourse which undertakes the analysis of works of literature so as to do justice to their 'embodiment' of meaning... if the importance of this became widely accepted by English teachers then means would undoubtedly be found to ensure that instead of being 'put off' reading literature by critical analysis, their students' interest in literature would be thereby deepened and extended.<sup>13</sup>

Gribble admits that, whenever offered, literary criticism is often presented as some technical expertise using literary texts as 'raw material for a form of highly mechanized processing in the academic factories' (p 34); but this does not justify the total dismissal of connection between the process of awareness developing through literature and the activity of literary criticism.

Learning to respond adequately to literary works and learning to articulate this response is, in part, learning to employ a form of discourse which can do justice to this organic interaction...

which should be the aim and role of literature education, for Gribble, since the basic task for literary study is to construct a 'comprehensive theory of literary discourse'.<sup>14</sup>

### Literature and social classes

According to Mathieson, after World War I it became an acknowledged fact that, considering the old problems of its elementary schools (large classes, poorly qualified teachers, physically weak children, many in part-time employment,

<sup>12</sup> James Gribble (1983) *Literary Education: a Revaluation*, p 2

<sup>13</sup> Gribble (1983) op cit., p 32

<sup>14</sup> Gribble (1983) op cit., pp 43, 78

plus the use of obsolete methods of mechanical rote-learning), England needed an educational reform which, besides capable of offering the sort of military and economic benefits enjoyed by Germany, with an education system free from irrelevant traditionalism, could also change the situation of cultural inferiority which characterised the English working class.

Mathieson explains that, at post-war time, there was a general belief that better education for all would help achieve greater social unity, and fight the evils of social divisiveness, in a background of general national sense of educational inferiority to Europe; and this could happen through the totally educative value of literature, to be learned for social and individual improvement. There were official widespread expressions of concern for the need for greater social justice through education. Recommendations were made to substitute English literature for the classics. Four committees were appointed between 1918 and 1919 to report on the teaching of science, modern languages, classics and English (language and literature). Sir Henry Newbolt chaired one of these committees, whose report opens as follows<sup>15</sup>:

The inadequate conception of the teaching of English in this country is not a separate defect which can be separately remedied. It is due to a more far-reaching failure - the failure to conceive the full meaning and possibilities of national education as a whole, and that failure again is due to a misunderstanding of the educational values to be found in the different regions of mental activity, and especially to an underestimate of the importance of English language and literature.

According to Mathieson, this Committee, as well as many other teachers, heads of schools and inspectors, was concerned with the dual system which prepared pupils for different ways of life, which kept the wide distance between classes through the education they received. Although judging the study of the classics as valuable and enjoyable, they believed its maintenance, due to the linguistic difficulties and nineteenth-century teaching methods, only served to keep that wide gap between classes. They proposed a new approach based on liberal education principles, for all children from all social classes (the ones educated to learn as well as those educated to earn), which they considered suited to the necessities of a general and national education.

In practice, memorising, rote-learning, arid composition writing and comprehension would be replaced by an emphasis on plain speech and writing,

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<sup>15</sup>*The Teaching of English in England* (London, HMSO, 1921), p 4

talking and listening, aiming at breaking down social barriers, at enabling a better comprehension of all other subjects, and having more confident and socially effective pupils. The stated goal of the Newbolt Report was 'to develop the mind and soul of the children and not merely provide tame and acquiescent labour fodder' (Mathieson, pp 184-5).

Still according to Mathieson, the fact was that English rich and poor seemed united in their inclination to misunderstand, undervalue and be bored by art in general. This was to be dealt with, according to the Committee, through 'imaginatively chosen material in English', since literature as comprehensible and enjoyable material might do much to raise the country's level of cultural appreciation. It was not, however, a proposal devoid of political purposes, considering George Sampson's words:

Deny to working-class children any common share in the immaterial, and presently they will grow into the men who demand with menaces a communism of the material.<sup>16</sup>

A very interesting point is raised by Mathieson; in order to be beneficial to working-class children as future wage-earners, literature classes should be deliberately irrelevant. That was to be achieved, the Committee suggested, by teaching literature at elementary school with the aim of, rather than imparting information, introducing students to 'great minds and new forms of experience'; by experiencing comprehensible and enjoyable literature, children might raise the national level of cultural appreciation. Mathieson believes that the language used in the Newbolt Report and *English for the English* suggests an almost religious responsibility of 'uplifting' placed now on English studies, substituting the classics and the Church; therefore, teachers of literature were at the time supposed to do the 'missionary work' of humanising the masses with passion, zeal, creativity and humility<sup>17</sup> (pp 186-7). Methods were not supposed to employ literary history, or 'meanings', or the explanation of difficulties, summaries of plays and stories, or descriptions of characters, all of those considered evasions of the real work of literature teaching.

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<sup>16</sup> George Sampson (1952) *English for the English*, Preface to the 1925 edition, p. xv.

<sup>17</sup> Mathieson (1987) op cit., p 187. The author confronts this view with that of Leavis and the Cambridge School of English in the 1930-40s, which called teachers to fight as warriors, as the cultural crisis seemed to be worsening.

Nevertheless, the new proposal for the diffusion of liberal culture did not encounter the sympathy of the working classes, who identified literature with the leisure of the higher classes, and were antagonistic to (and contemptuous of) what they viewed as a mere 'ornament, a polite accomplishment, a subject to be despised by really virile men'. Reaction came as follows:

We regard the prevalence of such opinions as a serious matter, not merely because it means the alienation of an important section of the population from the 'comfort' and 'mirth' of literature, but chiefly because it points to a morbid condition of the body politic which if not taken in hand may be followed by lamentable consequences... the nation of which a considerable portion rejects this [literature's] means of grace, and despises this great spiritual influence, must assuredly be heading to disaster.<sup>18</sup>

Since working-class's hostility to and distrust of literature was mainly found among those associated with organised labour movements, who suspected literature was an attempt to side-track their movement, the Committee's concern seems to signal a question of social politics rather than artistic or aesthetic concern.

### Modern times

In *Preachers of Culture* (1975), Mathieson shows how English (language, literature and culture) as a school subject has been connected with educational expansion, urban development and technological change

for humanising the nation's children, through literature, through creative use of their native language and through critical discrimination between art and the products of commercial entertainment. Viewed as a network of activities inside which children can achieve emotional, social and moral development, English has come to be seen as the school subject which, more than any other, requires teachers to have outstanding personal qualities.<sup>19</sup>

Between wars, English studies was expanding, but its status was still extremely low, in elementary schools, girls' schools, and Mechanics' Institutes, and could not yet be found in public schools and universities by the third decade of this century. Oxford's tutors believed it lacked 'rigorous mental discipline', according to Mathieson (*Preachers...* pp 123-5), whereas public-school headmasters despised it for its lack of difficulty and for its association with the education of girls and of the working classes<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> From *The Teaching of English in England*, p. 259. Quoted by Mathieson (1987) op cit., pp 187-8

<sup>19</sup> Margaret Mathieson (1975) *Preachers of Culture*, p. 12

<sup>20</sup> Richard Hoggart (1957) *The Uses of Literacy*, Chapter One, pp 19-22 defined as working class the people who work for a weekly wage, either self-employed or as small shopkeepers, educated at secondary modern schools, (skilled or unskilled) labourers, with clothing and speech (manner

Under the sub-heading 'English, culture and democracy', Doyle<sup>21</sup> explains how criteria for student selection had become increasingly merit-based and how the discipline in the late 1940s was expected to provide an education producing men and women unafraid to ask all questions, particularly those concerning the *quality of living*, rather than being content simply to fit people into *the machinery of society as it exists at present*', by abandoning the pre-war approach of 'covering the ground' to concentrate on improving reading ability and training taste (pp 102-3). In other words, English should instil 'mental discipline, the capacity for argument, and the independent, sensitive, and rigorous sifting of evidence' (p 106).

Many authors agree that the future of English studies depends on its defining a coherent body of knowledge. Doyle argues that perhaps the lack of precise definition of the aims of English lies in its tendency to avoid 'overt and detailed manifestos or statements' on which that critique would be based (p 117). In his concluding chapter, Doyle questions whether 'the objects, institutional mechanisms, and identity of English' can ever be compatible with democratic aspirations, and names two contradictory tendencies; the first implies the 'monumental' role of the discipline into the realms of national cultural heritage, while the second implies including the subject's crisis in its subject matter, performing a critical analysis of 'heritage' - sometimes pointed as the end of literature as a privileged cultural domain.

F.R. Leavis and I.A. Richards, in their very different ways<sup>22</sup>, played a powerfully influential role in the teaching of English literature with the practical method of training in discrimination. Its central characteristic was 'scientific' critical rigour, constituted of the literary-critical study of the literature of the English language and culture. Under their influence, English studies were given a close link between university studies and school practices of literature. Teachers were supposed to train students to 'resist' by bringing rigour and purpose into English studies, in a 'crusade for encouraging pupils' discrimination response to all

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of speaking, tone of voice) characteristics, etc., while acknowledging the existence of a range of grade differences.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Doyle (1989) *English and Englishness*

<sup>22</sup> Richards' *Practical Criticism* aimed at establishing textual authority, veracity, security in reading, a relatively psychological/formalist project. Leavis' project was a moral/aesthetic one, aimed at a literary/moral élite.

aspects of their environment, as a protection against their corruption by seditious political material.<sup>23</sup> The belief that

...art and the rest of human activity are continuous and not contrasting; and art is the most valuable of all activities because it encourages 'the balancing and ordering of our impulses'

was at the foundation of Leavis and Richards' approaches, in their concern with cultural disintegration, academic indifference and declining standards, plus the threat of mass-media control 'as exercised by the Nazis'<sup>24</sup>. Leavis, however, felt that by the eightieth year of compulsory education, the *environment* seemed to be winning, that is, children were falling prey to the entertainment industry, rather than entering the realm of high culture and great literature.

Fred Inglis describes Leavis' principle of centrality as based on a 'trigonometry of freedom, fulfilment and self-criticism' which constitute the Leavisite ground of being. Inglis considers that the historical opportunity which Leavis captured as editor of *Scrutiny* provided the idealisation and ideology of the current English curriculum still found in schools; 'to study what is excellent helps towards excellence' is its circular and classist argument, given the ambiguity of the definition of excellence<sup>25</sup>. For Inglis, to teach literature is to teach students to live well, cognitively joining 'the parallel tracks of literature and ethics'; he proposes a balance similar to Leavis' *poise*, straining to know what is live and what is dead in the stories of present time, which corresponds to standing where idealism and materialism cross.

... what sort of criticism will replace the old and discredited liberal 'practical' criticism which was merely an ideological outgrowth of capitalism, prizing those values of a decaying aristocracy which are characteristically revered by a sycophantic middle class<sup>26</sup>

is precisely one of the points I would like to clarify, which is, to what extent the shift from 'knowledge to be memorised' to the 'reading of good texts' to train students' sensibility as readers has effectively contributed to the social uses of literature at school in English classrooms.

<sup>23</sup> Mathieson (1975) op cit., p 123

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by Mathieson (1975), op cit., pp 131, 134

<sup>25</sup> Fred Inglis, 'Four Critics', in *The English Magazine* no. 4 - Summer 1980, pp 10-12

<sup>26</sup> Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, quoted by Gribble (1983), op cit., p 90

### Accounts of classroom situations for literature education

Different authors have written about what they have found in A-level literature classes; they somehow agree that there is a cultural and social difference between teachers and taught, as well as between methods and contents. Protherough, for instance, writes that *as more and more students 'take' literature, many of them confess to finding little real pleasure in it, to reading only what is set for examination, and to seeing no real connection between their lives and what they read.*<sup>27</sup> He has found that students think literature is defined by the group of works nominated worthy of study by someone else, unrelated to their own choices. Still, a common complaint among students seems to be that, due to classroom methods (*copying down the teacher's notes*) and the syllabuses imposed by examinations requirements, reading enjoyment can be destroyed.<sup>28</sup> Chris Woodhead, discussing poetry teaching-learning methods, declared having little doubt that the pedagogical methods used in literature classes go *a long way towards explaining why English lessons are often so boring and poems so little read.*<sup>29</sup>

In order to concentrate on the aspects which are relevant to this study, I would like to examine accounts of classroom situation from the perspective of those directly involved, asking *what teachers and students want* and *what teachers and students have*. Is there a discrepancy between the aims and outcomes? What does it take to pursue their aims, and to what extent do present methods and practices enforce empowerment and democracy with examinations as a goal? Or are empowerment and democracy no more than fallacies in academic jargon?

In his analysis of A-level students, teachers, practices and examinations, Protherough<sup>30</sup> tackles different and crucial aspects of the literature education system. First of all, he acknowledges that teacher and taught do not come to classroom interaction devoid of preconceived perceptions of each other and of the system; secondly, he states that teachers are conditioned by their own training in literary education, that is, those educated under the influence of Leavisite

<sup>27</sup> Robert Protherough (1986) *Teaching Literature for Examinations*, p.5

<sup>28</sup> Protherough (86), op cit., pp. 15, 36

<sup>29</sup> Chris Woodhead 'Getting the Proper Attention', in Victor Lee (ed.) (1987) *English literature in schools*, p. 328

<sup>30</sup> Robert Protherough (1986), op cit., pp 16-19



approaches will emphasise 'the civilising power of literature to combat the pressures of mass culture', while those with a more recent training will probably feel that the central point to address are 'the political ends of literary studies, or to see texts in a non-evaluative way as an entry point to a much wider pattern of systems and codes'. However, he indicates that, in some cases, literature teachers have no academic qualifications to teach literature (p 16).

If inappropriate and unimaginative English courses continue, it is because some teachers, including many who have never been trained for teaching English, give [pupils] a watered down version of what they remember from their own grammar school experiences'<sup>31</sup>;

the examination system 'has ensured that speculation on the possibility of different approaches to literature has remained speculation' (p 172), while students need, rather than triviality, a sense of permanence and continuity. Says Shayer: 'we do not know exactly how literature affects us and influences us or know what is happening when we read it' (p 175).

Criticisms of A-level examinations indicate that often students write carefully prepared essays without giving any impression of personal contact or involvement with the text. As long as emphasis is on memory, candidates will remain having to recall sequences and effectively preventing 'the possibilities of a proper critical response to the text in the light of the questions'<sup>32</sup>.

Among others, a recent piece of research carried out in English literature classrooms has found two main teaching styles, the *transmission* and the *initiation* modes<sup>33</sup>. The former consists of teacher-centred, teacher-controlled 'authoritative pronouncements to passive receivers, concentration on details and localised meanings, limitation of topics to those likely to appear in the examination', whereas the latter encourages personal responses, 'making principles available to students to operate for themselves, allowing them to ask questions as well as to answer them', largely influencing the kind of procedure students will internalise, and most importantly, influencing their lasting relationship with literature. Barnes & Barnes also point out that most of the literature they saw being dealt with in

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<sup>31</sup> David Shayer (1972), *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900-1970*, p 158, quoting from the 1963 Newson Report, which favours a creative line for the teaching of English. Some of the teachers later interviewed in England for this study were also found not to have had specific literature-teaching training.

<sup>32</sup> Shayer, op cit., p 182, citing Frances Stevens (1970) *English and Examinations*.

<sup>33</sup> Dorothy and Douglas Barnes w/ Stephen Clarke (1984) *Versions of English*, pp. 225-8

literature classrooms belonged in the private world: 'it seemed that in the books that were offered, experience was privatised and depoliticised; this was in part because of the choice of books' (p 232).

In the description of a survey conducted by Protherough with over 110 teachers of English, it was shown how most teachers expressed uncertainty about the nature of the subject, bewildered by its complexity and by the hidden curriculum which affects their way of making sense of the world. In general, their views of the subject could be organised into five categories: personal growth view, cross-curricular view, adult needs view, cultural heritage view, and cultural analysis view; teachers of English implicitly compared those views, rejecting one in favour of another.<sup>34</sup>

Brown & Gifford, when writing about A-level literature courses, interviewed many A-level students about their expectations, likes and dislikes. Among varied responses, they also found students complaining about the doses of dictated notes and packaged information.<sup>35</sup> They quote the general statement found in the Common Core A level pamphlet about the aims of syllabuses (p. 4):

To encourage an enjoyment and appreciation of English Literature based on an informed response and to extend this appreciation where it has already been acquired.

From this statement, the language of which seems to offer little practical orientation for school teachers, there can be perceived a combination of cognitive and affective purposes, without any clarification of teachers' and examiners' assumptions about literary reading, appreciation and 'response', especially because critical theories do not seem to be included in the provision for appreciation, lest they can damage the *personal* element.

Brown & Gifford identify as the teacher's main role to 'encourage the tentative and hesitant voice' of her students; if students are assured that their 'questions will be welcomed in the place of confident statements', the challenging search for a personal voice may be rewarding, and they will be more hesitant about borrowing from critics (p 9). As there is no neutral reading, there is no neutral teaching; Brown & Gifford propose a series of experimental approaches, such as inviting students to discuss learning strategies, and sharing their thoughts about teaching and learning, in order to allow each of them a more active role in their

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<sup>34</sup> Protherough & Atkinson (1994) op cit., pp 12-13

<sup>35</sup> John Brown and Terry Gifford (1989) *Teaching A Level English Literature*, p. 2

own learning process (pp 41-3). Nevertheless, they acknowledge that the debate about the nature of English studies has not reached A level at all, a stage they see as yet very conservative (pp 67-71):

Taking stock of where they have reached in terms of advanced reading and criticism would be of real educational value to students.

Considering the ideal reader one who would be able to draw on a wide repertoire of reading and cultural knowledge against which new readings could be explored and evaluated, Brown & Gifford regret the inevitable tension between the experience of reading and that of preparing the same book for the A-level examination. They question whether there are ways of using this tension in the learning process (p 76), when, for instance, questions are often at such a high level of abstraction that the student is unable to choose and select material in her own terms. They quote an example (p 145),

‘The core of the play is the conflict between good and evil.’  
Is this a fair comment on *Hamlet*?

to conclude that they have no doubts about the need for reforms in examining literature: ‘there are many complaints [by examiners] about “mechanical”, tired writings, as if only the students were to blame and not the system’. The authors suggest that, if A level is to be relevant for students who want to read and write at an advanced level, real syllabuses should be designed, aiming at students as readers and producers, enabling them to study past and present culture and society (p 179).

Barnes & Barnes write about their observation experience of sixth-form literature by saying: ‘the first impression of the classes was that we had moved into a women’s world: ... no boys [there] took A-level literature’. However, the teaching situation is different: ‘A-level teaching tends to be given to those experienced university graduates who are in senior positions and these are usually men’<sup>36</sup>. According to different descriptions of literature classrooms, such portrait of a gender bias surrounding the subject, although not my immediate area of

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<sup>36</sup> Barnes & Barnes (1984), op cit., p 260. On p. 386 they wrote: ‘It seems that literary culture is seen as a proper accompaniment to the female role, where it is linked with a valuation of insight and sympathy above conflict and power, and perhaps also linked with private or domestic milieux. We might surmise that because girls usually internalise these gender typifications they will be more at home with the literary-personal approach to English than boys are, and to an extent this is true, since more girls than boys expressed enjoyment of the subject... Nevertheless, many girls were as sceptical as boys about the public usefulness of English as it had been experienced in schools... In general, gender in college courses is related to gender in the outside world...’

concern for this study, seemed to be an important issue for teachers and taught, and I hoped to clarify their positions about it in the interviewing process.

There are different issues surrounding the absence of clear critical theories at school<sup>37</sup>; teachers acknowledge that they teach for the examinations, and examiners usually stress the liberal-humanist principle of individuality, of subjective competence in readers' response to the literary artefact; critical theories might supposedly interfere with the authenticity of those responses. Besides, it has also been said that 'teachers tend to hold examinations responsible for their uncertainties', therefore inappropriate academic demands force formal, analytic methods upon them: 'as long as examinations can be blamed for all our difficulties... they will deflect attention from other important considerations'<sup>38</sup>.

Marius (in Engell & Perkins) writes that many literature teachers nowadays believe that modern critical schools of thought are pernicious, whereas his belief is that 'some detailed, analytical attention to the literature of criticism' is indispensable for literature teaching. Such literature should be discussed in class in the same detail as plays, poetry and novels are treated (p. 185). He also writes that the use of essays as the main (often exclusive) form of literary assessment is due to the fact that A-level literature was founded by scholars, not teachers. This requires from students a voice, identity and maturity their age range and reading experience is not yet ready for. Moreover, unlike other art-related syllabuses, it prescribes their creativity limits. The question is, how are students made certain of the validity of their personal response? Does the school system value their own subjective and cultural experience, offering theoretical support to expand their fragmentary view of the written text? Do they have to rely on teachers' own criteria as law, truth and final word, without exposing their own questions, doubts and difficulties? At this stage, are students supposed (or allowed) to treat texts with irreverence? Why are there so many complaints from students about the difficulty and dryness of reading the set texts for the exams?

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<sup>37</sup> Janet Emig 'Our Missing Theory' in Charles Moran & E.F. Penfield (1990) *Conversations: contemporary critical theory and the teaching of literature*, p 89: 'The view of theory many of us currently hold is that it represents an explanatory matrix of some phenomenon or phenomena, formulated, preferably, with formality, power, and elegance. If asked where we acquired such a definition of theory, most of us would confess that we developed it over a significant period of time... as a result of inculcation through our undergraduate courses...'

<sup>38</sup> M. Mathieson 'The problem of poetry', *Use of English*, vol. 31, n. 2, Spring 1980, p. 39

## Syllabuses and examinations

In opting for a syllabus, schools reveal a great deal of their implicit agendas; the AEB 0660, for instance, includes a percentage of coursework (decreased from 50% to 20% in 1994-95), allowing a larger flexibility in the choice of literary bodies (the college has opted to include black and feminist literature in coursework folders), while also demanding more active participation of literature teachers in the examining process. On the other hand, the AEB 0660, Oxford and Cambridge, AEB 0623, and ULEAC 9170/ 9176 have a common feature, which is the emphasis on individual style characteristics, substantial definition of contents, and *self-motivation*. Literature students are not expected to require external motivating prompting or stimuli to read, interpret and write about texts; no clear theory is brought forward, and they are trained to 'respond personally' in their examination papers, which apparently rule over all. Foucault wrote that examinations combine

the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgement. It is a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination [a slender technique in which are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power] is highly ritualised.<sup>39</sup>

Examinations effect knowledge at the level of consciousness, of representations, as well as at the level of transforming knowledge into political investment. Thus, they are long-lasting throughout the teaching-learning process, a permanent factor interwoven with a ritual of power, enabling the teacher, 'while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge'<sup>40</sup>. Also, examinations introduce 'individuality into the field of documentation', with a 'power of writing' constituted as an essential part in the mechanisms of discipline' while making each individual a case which may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, at the same time as he must be trained or corrected, classified, normalised, excluded. 'The more one possesses power or privilege, the more one is marked as an individual, by rituals, written accounts or visual reproductions'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Michel Foucault (1995) *Discipline and Punish*, pp 184-5

<sup>40</sup>Foucault (1995) op cit., p 186

<sup>41</sup>Foucault (1995) op cit., pp 189 - 192

All these considerations about the role of examinations resonate disciplinary regulations and methods, processes of submission and control. 'A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved'.<sup>42</sup> As described, the more centralised establishments viewed made stronger use of discipline, which Foucault defines as 'a political anatomy of detail' (p 139); utility forces (learning to respond to examiners' demands in written exams and in interviews; getting equipped to satisfy perspective employers) were emphasised along with political obedience (of the body, of cognitive responses), dissociating power from the body and protected by *disciplinary monotony*, time-tables, cycles of repetition, 'coercive link with the apparatus of production' (p 153). Whereas sitting younger students in rows is considered part of the mechanism of better control, limiting peer-communication and social exchange, the circle arrangement which was found prevailing in sixth-form classrooms allows more effective surveillance, according to Foucault, as the Panopticon's *perfect eye* that nothing escapes and 'a centre towards which all gazes would be turned' (p 173).

The 'prefect' system found at Hollybush School can also be considered as part of the surveillance process in a system of supervision: selected among the best pupils, they integrate the disciplinary power. 'A relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching, not as an additional or adjacent part, but as a mechanism that is inherent to it and which increases its efficiency'. 'By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power became an "integrated" system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised.'<sup>43</sup> Even when a non-outstanding student is awarded the prefect pin, it is still part of the gratification-punishment system inherent to the discipline process, which Foucault explains as 'a distribution between a positive pole and a negative pole' (p 180).

### Addressing the main issues

Kampf & Lauter ask who is criticism for, and what does it do to/for people who read it?<sup>44</sup>:

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<sup>42</sup>Foucault (1995) op cit., p 136

<sup>43</sup>Foucault (1995) op cit., p 176

<sup>44</sup> Louis Kampf & Paul Lauter (1973) *The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English*. New York: Vintage Books, p 15

For both student and teacher this means, in fact, that literature is not apprehended as a civilizing force but *is studied* as one field in a body of formal knowledge. Can the introduction of students to a formal discipline be called criticism? (p 20)

They also question the fact that, although more students are doing literature, reading books seems most irrelevant to their lives; is it due to the fact that teaching and criticism have become instruments of oppression rather than of enlightenment? (pp 21-2) The authors argue that literature and its education are weapons in maintaining or transforming the received order of social relations; they claim that, in order to be part of a socialist literary practice, those weapons must be appropriated through the creation of a 'radical' critical methodology, lest schools go on functioning as 'the arbiters of taste' (p 45), creating a situation in which pupils/audiences do not participate in the cultural enterprise, but merely act as spectators at a performance (p 46).

Cantarow describes how, during her gradual changing towards political awareness, she tried to connect her literature teaching to her politics, and acknowledged the need to acquire a theory, one that might be

a natural extension of revolution, a continual process of learning in which both teacher and students might participate, in which education was coextensive with work and both were unalienated.<sup>45</sup>

This she believes to be part of the political struggle for the empowerment of the working classes, representing their culture without slavishly imitating the style of the class in power. She also points out that the sort of literary education which liberal theories recommend for the 'enrichment' of one's life turns literature into an isolated accomplishment 'that confirms the sterility of life under capitalism' and works as a tool to impose on students the ideologies of those in power (p 91).

The very ability of the English ruling class - in both politics and literature - to absorb and neutralize those aspiring from below has led to an accelerating loss of local and submerged cultures different from the dominant culture.<sup>46</sup>

In England, the love of literature has been implicitly expected to be developed privately, in the middle and upper-class homes; to experience literature has been compared to encounter the pleasures of joy that elevate the reader to a higher moral tone, as well as to a better form or style in language use. Without a specific theory of knowledge, this seems to have served as basis for the

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<sup>45</sup> Ellen Cantarow 'Why Teach Literature?' in Kampf & Lauter (1973) op cit., p 73

<sup>46</sup> Martha Vicinus '19th-Century British Working-class Poetry', in Kampf & Lauter (1973) op cit., p 348

pedagogical definition of literature education, the aim of which now would be to elevate the quality of national life.

Eagleton defines the strategic use of literature education as a cultivation of the traditional style of the aristocracy in the middle classes, by linking them to *the best culture of their nation*, which should result in an elevation of their moral and spiritual standards.<sup>47</sup> In general, literature education in English syllabuses has been accused of denying the post-colonial position claimed for by other communities, therefore remaining problematic as long as the re-thinking of the limitations of 'a consensual and collusive "liberal" sense of cultural community'<sup>48</sup> is avoided.

Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity—between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private—as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation.<sup>49</sup>

I found among literature students in England a clientele coming not only from varied social origins, but also from other countries and cultures, at the inner-city schools and college. This generates at least two major areas of conflict: one is the socio-political role of exclusively British English texts imposed on students coming from other English-speaking cultures, in contrast with the absence of their own voices, that is, the absence of a literature which represents other colonised societies and ethnic minorities in which they are to be represented.

Some syllabuses include a small number of black writers, usually the ones whose work has been analysed, approved of and internationally celebrated by other media, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, without, however, considering the inclusion of black history and education as part of the canon. It cannot be forgotten that the teaching of literature is the contingent teaching of values, the teaching of an aesthetic and political order in which racial minorities and women have found little reflection or representation of their images, and hardly any resonance of their cultural voices (as also stated by Gates, in Moran & Penfield ed., p. 69). It seems that the real issue should not be how to teach a book written by a black, but 'how to develop a socialist literary practice' (Kampf and Lauter, p. 45).

It has been argued that, if English teachers have any formal knowledge of working-class habits, either historically or 'as they impinge on the lives of the

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<sup>47</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, p.24

<sup>48</sup> Bhabha (1994), op cit., p 175

<sup>49</sup> Bhabha (1994), op cit., p 175



children they teach', it may be due to the fact that roles are internalised through the consumption of texts in childhood, and the suggestive meanings found in books are immensely powerful.<sup>50</sup> Thus, teachers of literature with a middle-class background, acting in working-class environments, are usually faced with the intrinsic contradiction of carrying the effects of their own upbringing values, and the option for a critical awareness in terms of politically democratic possibilities in their classrooms. The practical social-class problem in English literature mainly lies on the question of whether or not 'to evolve worthwhile modern English is to evolve English for the masses'<sup>51</sup>.

It is my view that literature education, through the voices of different writers, should be a discipline of studies in a continuous process of change, given its multiplicity of signs, and considering its multifarious disciplinary foundation. Depending on individual profiles, it emphasises opposing values, hegemonic or revolutionary, artistic or cognitive, liberating or reactionary. From the above, it seems most of those involved are not happy about its present paradigms, and literature education appears to be a subject permanently on the verge of radical change.

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<sup>50</sup> According to Hoggart, in Miller (ed.), pp 131-4

<sup>51</sup> D. Holbrook, in Shayer, *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900-1970*, p.149

## **SECTION B - Viewing English literature classes**

In this section I will be describing the observation experience carried out throughout six months in 1994 as part of the reconnaissance process. The schools viewed will be described below, and two of them were chosen to concentrate the fieldwork and consequent production of data: a home-county school and an inner-city college.

### **Applebee Secondary**

The first school observed was 'Applebee Secondary', a large inner-city comprehensive situated in a middle-class enclave, and attended by an ethnic variety of students. I followed Abdul, the teacher I would be viewing, to his registration group, where, in spite of the relaxed appearance, students called him 'sir' and waited for his permission to sit down and to leave the room, after being reminded to re-arrange the chairs. His lower-sixth class, with eight female and two male students, had been asked to read either the first or the last monologue in Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*. Applebee Secondary follows the literature syllabus proposed by the Oxford and Cambridge Examination Board. I was formally introduced and urged to participate by the teacher, a large and inspiring presence, and throughout two lessons two students read 'A Chip in the Sugar' and 'Bed Among the Lentils'. Abdul, who had confided he felt a bit uneasy about being observed, provided the questions, most of the answers, trying to provoke a discussion; his students did not seem at ease either. I made notes and tape-recorded the lessons, sitting at one end of the semi-circle disposition. The treatment between students and teacher was formal, and between lessons Abdul asked me to explain my research better, and to talk to the students, if I wanted to.

Asked why they had chosen literature, all except one of the male students said they had done well in their GCSEs and had decided to pursue A-level literature. Now speaking quite freely and at ease, they confided that they had lost some of their initial motivation and impetus due to the lack of space to expose their own ideas, opinions and doubts; they unanimously said that there seemed to be a communication problem with most teachers, who lacked a facilitating method, or attitude (they said that *they know what to teach, but not necessarily how to teach*)

although all were considered highly competent in terms of specific literary knowledge. Abdul seemed interested to know students' opinions in general, asking them why they did not approach teachers to make methodological suggestions; his students pointed out that most teachers would be personally offended if they did it. A gender issue came up when seven female students declared that they were doing literature because of lack of familial and social encouragement to do sciences.

### Modern Mews

'Modern Mews' was another large inner-city purpose-built school, placed in the middle of a green area, quiet and well organised; students did not wear a uniform. I was asked to wait outside for security reasons, until John, the head of English, came to meet me. A large poster at the entrance boasted the multiple ethnic and linguistic variety, with over seventy languages spoken and several of these taught there. A large number of students wearing ethnic garments could also be seen. Modern Mews used the AEB 0660 literature syllabus, then with 50% coursework.

Three weeks were spent on observation visits there; although access had been granted beforehand, most teachers, however, were hesitant to let me observe their classes, fearing their activities would not be entirely useful for my research; for instance, some would be *only* doing oral work with their classes or *just* checking homework on that day; others feared the *low level* of their classes would disappoint me or contribute little to my study.

John's own lower sixth group sat in rows, practising arguments for a formal debate. Work was done orally and in groups, with a final debate, the rules of which students found unclear, therefore difficult to follow in the preparation and presentation of their arguments. The theme was 'Is Britain a democracy?'. Not having been introduced, I was consequently ignored by the group.

Jan's class was more structured, with a study of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. She had warned me that the level of this class was especially low. Again I was not introduced, and my presence was not acknowledged. The teacher performed in a way which I would later perceive as a regular feature in literature classrooms in England: she read one or two pages, interrupting to explain the vocabulary she knew they would find difficult, and occasionally halted for a

summing-up of the plot, asking questions orally to check students' attention and reading comprehension, to resume her reading. Twice Jan asked students to try to predict the next scene, and gradually they seemed to get involved in the story line. Students sat in pre-arranged semi-circle disposition, and the teacher on top of a desk. She kept a professional posture, and when one of the male students (there were ten girls and three boys) attempted to interrupt her reading she called him 'silly' and told him to be quiet. Only near the end of the lesson would she notice that he and a few other students were trying to tell her that she had already read that part before. I would see this group again with Jack, a week later.

At Modern Mews I also observed Donald's upper sixth group of five girls doing Sean O'Casey's autobiography; after individual silent reading, they were divided into two groups and asked to develop the concept of autobiography, looking at the level of fictionality, literary and linguistic resources, classification of discourse (*emotional, descriptive or rational*); after a quick discussion, each was to list the characteristics on cardboard paper and present them to the other group, in the final ten minutes of the lesson. The teacher interfered little, leaving to the group to give their points-of-view and to decide upon concepts and definitions.

I was asked to participate in a students-only discussion as part of their Media studies project. Four female students were creating a thriller, but got distracted by the absence of three other elements in their group, complaining that *things were too disorganised there*. Another student was very critical of their teacher, who, according to her, *knew nothing about teaching media*.

Sean was the next lower-sixth teacher, who was working on informal argument. The theme he had chosen was 'lowering the age of consent for gays', which was being much discussed in the media; he had brought photocopies of two editorials and an article from *The Guardian*, and a whisky advertisement which he analysed semiotically as being favourable to the lower age limit. There were seven male and two female students, sitting in a half-moon arrangement, who were asked to do a silent reading, highlighting the main points on the text. Then Sean read it aloud, stopping to make comments and asking for arguments.

The last teacher observed at Modern Mews was Jack. His was the same group viewed before with Jan, a lower-sixth with seven female and three male

students sitting in rows<sup>1</sup>. Jack wanted to introduce *Macbeth* and after talking about the importance of reading Shakespeare for its literary beauty, its historical and cultural value, he handed out photocopied sheets with Lady Macbeth's address to the witches. He used varied approaches to interest the students, to have their attention and silence - asking for support from those who also did A-Level Theatre, excitedly talking about the Renaissance, history, religion, ancient knowledge, alchemy, philosophy, psychology and Shakespeare's life. The students did not participate or interact, apart from a black girl, who later told me she copydesks in a publishing company; most students dozed or engaged in private conversation in small groups. Jack did a dramatic reading of the excerpt, explaining the vocabulary, phrases, sound effects, and cultural links. He tried to engage me in his discussion, asking what knowledge of Shakespeare Brazilians have. After the lesson was over, he privately confided that, had I not been present, his attitude would have been different, and he would certainly have been less patient. As I mentioned the interacting student who participated in that lesson, he said her command of written language was not good compared to another girl in class who usually did better, and was surprised to hear she had a copydesking job.

### Summerhill

I was interested in experiencing Summerhill. I had phoned the head, A.S. Neill's daughter, in advance, and was informed that they were open to visiting groups once a month. I joined the March 1994 party of sixty-two from Cambridge, Ireland, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Austria, America, Canada, Japan and Brazil. I spent one whole day there, talking to teachers, students, the headteacher and other staff. Situated on a small seaside town, the school is famous for its radical progressivism, about which I had read a lot, and which intrigued and inspired me as an educator. I had had close contact with two alternative schools in Brazil which tried to recreate the spirit of Summerhill. Visiting Summerhill proved relevant because attempts to re-think democratic aims in education ask for a re-reading of alternative approaches, active learning and early twentieth-century progressivism. There are two basic comments to make about specific elements

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<sup>1</sup>None of the teachers observed changed the desk arrangements found in their classrooms, leaving the physical disposition as encountered.

concerning literature education. The school still follows A.S. Neill's principle that books are not important (although he was a keen reader himself) for children's growth and education; consequently, its library is appallingly poor, and its importance was belittled at least in two different occasions during the visit (as tape-recorded); the tour-leading teacher said that today's occasional readers were interested in 'Dungeons and Dragons' only.

It was also interesting to talk to Sarah, the English teacher. She told me about her frustration while working at a State school where, besides having to do a large amount of paperwork which prevented her from reading or studying, she had thirty-five students in class and could barely do any individual work with them, whereas in Summerhill she usually has between five and eight. Although there is no obligation to attend classes, as students get older and decide to take GCSEs, Summerhill's terminal level, they quite pragmatically decide for stricter rules regarding punctuality and assiduity, and demand to acquire solid grammar knowledge. Sarah disagreed with the teachers who said that children did not care for books: her Summerhill students did read a lot, mainly fantasy, and enjoyed talking about the books they had read afterwards. She had read short stories with the GCSE candidates, and also did *The Crucible* in three lessons, just for the pleasure of it, suggested by *a semi-illiterate, dyslexic student who wanted to practice reading*. As they only come to classes when/ if they want to, motivation is unnecessary; mostly they are keen on seeing the purpose of what they are doing and approach learning from a very practical stand.

### Hollybush School

Hollybush School was one of the two chosen for closer observation. I had felt it was important to view other ambiances than the Inner-city schools before attempting to describe literature teaching in England. Living in a home county for one year facilitated my access to two shire-county schools; a small town's social, cultural and political profile seemed to point to a distinct trend compared to that found in larger urban areas in England. The first school was Hollybush, which, along with St Martin's, has a good reputation in that shire as successfully training candidates for A-level exams.

After various negotiating attempts I was allowed to enter Hollybush School as an observer and, later on, interviewer. It was a large purpose-built comprehensive school with well-kept gardens and clean surroundings, with secondary school and sixth form. Students had to wear uniform, except for A-level students, who had agreed on a two-colour (navy and white) scheme; jeans and trainers were not allowed, nor extravagant jewellery or accessories. Male students wore ties, female students always made up and dressed up. Before attempting to enter the school proper, I was questioned by different staff, for security reasons. I was shown the way to the English department, where teachers worked isolatedly in desks built in wall niches, apparently planning their lessons.

Hollybush was a mixed-ability comprehensive with an annual average intake of 161 students at year 7, and a total of 68 teaching staff (of which 25 male and 20 female working full time, and three male and twenty female teaching part-time), plus fifteen non-teaching staff (eight ancillary, five technicians, two librarians). At the time there were 164 (78 lower and 86 upper) sixth-form students, sixty of whom doing English, together with other subjects for A-level exams. There were eight English teachers.

The summary leaflet released by the English department at 'Hollybush School' stated as its aim:

to help pupils to develop their language skills and to foster an enjoyment for English language, while placing emphasis on appropriateness of expression and clarity in communication [...] to help the children to develop a feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment deriving from their use of language and involvement in all its modes.

At Advanced level, students continued to develop their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Bernstein asserts that 'where the pedagogy is invisible, the hierarchy is *implicit*, space and time are weakly classified'; 'control inheres in *elaborated interpersonal communication* in a context where maximum surveillance is possible'; (...) 'invisible pedagogies realize specific modalities of social control which have their origins in a particular fraction of the middle class'<sup>2</sup>. This quite accurately portrays Hollybush's written guidelines and actual implementation.

In the above quoted leaflet advertising the school, there was a clear change of tone, from pleasurable (*enjoyment, satisfaction*) and persuasive

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<sup>2</sup> Basil Bernstein (1977) *Class, Codes and Control* vol. 3, Chapter 6, p 135

(*appropriateness, help, involvement*) in lower school to a result-oriented language (*continue, develop*) in upper school, and a little balanced distribution of duties and tasks among the four basic linguistic-communicative skills students were supposed to master in the study of languages, native or foreign. No promises were made beyond the mastery of the four skills. Hollybush used the AEB 0623 language and literature syllabus, a choice that confirmed aims and set values.

It demands wide reading of (canonical) literary and non-literary texts, including other media (radio, newspapers and magazines, television); such combination did not seem fulfilled by the practice observed at Hollybush.

The 0623 syllabus combines language and literature, prescribes 'wide reading' of daily and weekly newspapers and periodicals, and the study of set texts; candidates should also use radio, television and film in their preparation, while being aware of style and content, being able to apply their insights to current practice in English writing of various kinds (speeches, letters, reports, advertisements and newspaper comments; literary and non-literary texts).

Paper 1 (each paper made 33.3 % of the total marks) has two compulsory questions, a piece of continuous writing and a test of skills of summary writing; paper 2 has a compulsory exercise in understanding of the matter and form of unseen material, and two questions on two books, offered by the candidate among:

Philip Howard - *The State of the Language*; Alan Bennett - *Talking Heads*; Tom Stoppard - *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; Bernard Levin - *All Things Considered*; Laurence Sterne - *The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy*; Truman Capote - *In Cold Blood*; Susan Hill (Ed) - *The Penguin Book of Women's Short Stories*; Maya Angelou - *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

For Paper 3, it requested a piece of writing on two books from each section:

I - Daniel Defoe - *A Journal of the Plague Year* or Jonathan Swift - *Gulliver's Travels*; Shakespeare - *Hamlet* or *The Winter's Tale*; Chaucer - *The Knight's Tale* or Shakespeare's *Sonnets*; Richard Sheridan - *The Rivals* or John Marston - *The Malcontent*.  
 II - Charlotte Bronte - *Jane Eyre* or Thomas Hardy - *Jude the Obscure*; *The Everyman Book of Victorian Verse - the post-Romantics* or *Home at Grasmere*; Virginia Woolf - *Mrs Dalloway* or D. H. Lawrence - *Sons and Lovers*; Ted Hughes - *Crow* or Elizabeth Jennings - *Selected Poems*; Brian Friel - *Making History* or Pinter - *No Man's Land*; Toni Morrison - *Beloved* or Robert Holman - *Across Oka*.



When looking at staff relationships, Bernstein writes that ‘the organizing principle is integration’<sup>3</sup>. There seemed to be evident consensus about rules, methods and strategies inside Hollybush’s English department, whose agreed superiority demanded qualitative selection of A-level candidates (not always met) and allowed overt criticism of the school’s general rules. Although Sue, for instance, believed that her department colleagues supported each other and had integrated ideas, this did not necessarily mean that teaching materials were planned communally, or that literary-pedagogical issues were discussed among teachers. As seen, each teacher worked privately in his/her niche by the wall, without communicating with each other, or exchanging ideas.

I was able to view a year 8 (the teacher was working on discourse, dialects, pronunciations and the values those differences imply, with twenty-six students), an upper-sixth class (annotating Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*), a year seven (working on structured exercises on their textbooks to check spelling accuracy and enlargement of vocabulary) before viewing Pete’s and Sue’s lower-sixth classes.

a. Pete introduced me formally and briefly to his class at the beginning of the lesson. There were nine female and five male students, sitting in rows. I sat at the end of a middle row. They were reading Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam A.H.H.’, written in 1833. Pete’s teaching strategies followed the pattern seen so far: reading stanzas, halting for clarification, vocabulary checking and comprehension questions, translating meanings without students’ interference. He talked about the poet’s usual structures, explained the meaning of elegies, recommended that some criticism should be read, in general. A student asked whether it was a religious poem, he replied it had *a social function*, and read one stanza as an example, asking the class to read the whole text at home. His hands trembled slightly. He provided a lot of historical data on Tennyson and contemporaries; each of his questions was followed by his own answers, after ten to twelve seconds. The same student then amused the class by asking whether Pete thought that *Tennyson was gay*; his response was to offer historical data and scientific explanation to guarantee the poet’s virility.<sup>4</sup> Most students were silently engaged in their own

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<sup>3</sup> B Bernstein (1977), op. cit., vol. 3, p 83

<sup>4</sup> Later on, when interviewed, she labelled herself as ‘big mouth’, who voiced what the others were thinking but had no courage to ask.

games, private exchange of notes and letter-writing. Four more lessons were viewed with Pete and his lower-sixth class.

b. Sue asked me to introduce myself, in a lighter and more informal manner. With fifteen students (only two males) in a semi-circle arrangement, the atmosphere was quite relaxed, students talkative and easy. Sue used the ordinary strategy of reading stanzas from Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall', stopping to explain structures, vocabulary, and translate the general meaning of each part, in a noisy ambience. Most students made questions, interrupting her reading, giving impressions and opinions, without looking intimidated. Sue apologised to me for viewing another lesson on Tennyson (the first had been Pete's). Some students offered me their books to read from, but knowing they make notes on the margins for the exams, I declined their offer. Besides mentioning the poet's historical time, she talked about the political, economic and social problems of Victorian England; she highlighted *the beauty of Tennyson's poetry*. Near the end of the lesson, Sue was having to shout herself hoarse for attention and some silence. I observed four more lessons with Sue's group before I started interviewing her students.

### St Martin's School

St Martin's School is situated in a well-kept Victorian building surrounded by magnificent gardens. Its refined-mannered students wear a uniform throughout secondary school and follow a dress code for sixth form. When I visited it, Mr De Mornay was the literature teacher and head of department, a very busy professional whom I only managed to meet after intensive search, a couple of letters and various telephone calls. He eventually put me at ease by saying that being observed was very natural for him, as St Martin's had always received many researchers.

Before entering his upper-sixth class for two lessons, he confided that *he needed a bucketful of coffee before facing those students, so ignorant, so uncultured, so early in the morning*. There were ten female and three male students, arranged in a semi-circle. They set to work on Keats' poetry, after the teacher mentioned the hand-outs (with critical essays) previously distributed. He tested their knowledge through literary puzzles in a very formal climate, leading the students across the flaws, contradictions, positive and negative aspects in the

poems, describing Keats' narrative style in those poems and in the letters, besides mentioning criteria for word-selection analysis and stanza construction other than rhyming. In an ambience of absolute discipline, students seemed interested and eager to learn. Mr De Mornay also called their attention to sound effects, motives, the author's intentions, content and discourse analysis; he gave them an indication of suitable references with analysis of concrete elements, descriptions and resources to enhance their own narrative in the exams. Always the same pair of students answered all the questions.

Twice Mr De Mornay signalled to me to express his annoyance with the students' lack of wider knowledge: first, when he requested a link between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the text being analysed; later, when he made an ironical comment about how he expected them to perform in the exams, with such cultural gaps, and apologised to me. I said I thought they were good students, and he laughed aloud. Students exchanged glances, but did not react.<sup>5</sup> At the interval, as I explained my main interest was not literary knowledge per se, the teacher described his teaching style as very *informal and pleasant*, using varied approaches and strategies. He praised his next group highly.

With six male and nine female students, the lower-sixth group reacted in a more relaxed and confident manner to the teacher's cultural prompting. They started by discussing the coming play they were to perform, its scenery, costumes, etc. Now Mr De Mornay was carrying a tape-recorder himself, hanging from his neck. They resumed work on Shakespeare's *Othello*, with the class discussing it as *spectators rather than readers*. As the teacher mentioned works of art, other plays and television programmes, one of the boys brought up a film in which the leading personage is 'killed' a few times, but always manages to survive (*Cliff-hanger*). Mr De Mornay did not appreciate the comparison, which he dismissed as *below that discussion's standard* and emphasised that *Othello kills Desdemona as a judge, rather than as a man*. Characters' feelings, characteristics, actions and motives were analysed after an expressive reading during which the teacher ignored students' attempts to interrupt his performing. The whole group seemed totally

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<sup>5</sup>Willar Waller (1967) wrote that 'rarely is punishment pure, for it is usually mingled with all sorts of mechanisms of personal and social disapproval, with outbursts of temper, ridicule, threats, and intimidations designed to make the occasion more memorable or to furnish an outlet for the teacher's temper'. *The Sociology of Teaching* (p 201).

absorbed by the lesson, and actively interested; soon time was up, after two stimulating lessons.

The teacher distributed sheets with the homework, and although I asked for one I did not get it. I also asked for a copy of their syllabus, which he promised to mail me. I would like to come and view more of his work, but he withdrew and recommended that I should see someone else; if absolutely necessary to return, I ought to make another written request.

### **Inner-city College**

Offering A-level preparation for post-sixteen young adults, the Inner-city College was characterised by a more informal and relaxed atmosphere than any of the schools visited, without uniform and a first-name treatment between teachers and students. Its written proposal for a multi-cultural curriculum reflected 'the needs of the local community' and its 'community spirit' involved a tutorial system, student counsellors, careers advice, learning support and special needs. Extra activities were also supposed to be offered, such as occasional visits to theatres, cinemas, concerts and exhibitions, and lunch time speakers were invited to the college. It was composed of a mixture of old buildings and pre-fab huts situated in different precincts where students attended different areas of studies with limited comfort.

The English department appeared to be a united group of committed professionals whose main connection was Rose, the English co-ordinator. There teachers prepared reading and studying materials, which they shared with each other, and held weekly meetings to discuss problems, difficulties, ideas and new proposals. There were twelve teachers sharing year-one and year-two classes, besides offering lunch-time workshops on a walk-in basis for those students requiring extra attention.

According to the booklet distributed by the College, teachers

aim for all students to achieve success in terms of learning, gaining valuable qualifications and moving on afterwards to their next goal. We also aim for the whole experience to be an enjoyable time of personal development. We work hard to ensure students choose the right course by providing an information and advice service. All our staff strive to provide high quality teaching, good facilities and learning support as well as personal support and advice. We expect high standards from all our students.

Equal opportunities were seen to, since the college policies, according to the brochure, do not tolerate racist or sexist behaviour or any form of discrimination. Specific guidance for English Literature A Level (AEB 0660) determined what the course involved and entry requirements. The assessment objectives of the AEB 0660 syllabus for the 1994 examination required from the candidate ability to:

- . show first-hand knowledge of a text and, where appropriate, of the personal and historical circumstances in which it was written;
- . see meanings beneath the surface of a text;
- . understand the nature and interplay of characters;
- . show appreciation of an author's style;
- . make a well-considered personal response to a text;
- . show how texts excite emotions in readers or audiences;
- . make interested and informed conjectures, when asked, about the intentions of a writer;
- . sustain a wide reading of an author or of a number of writings on the same theme or in one genre;
- . explore works written for a different kind of society and in a different idiom from the candidate's own;
- . write effectively, and appropriately, in response to texts studied

whereas a course based on this syllabus required:

- . appreciation of the wide variety of response which literature evokes;
- . exploration of texts in order to discover fresh insights;
- . understanding of themselves and others;
- . reflection on what has been read;
- . an awareness of ambiguities and an expression of this awareness, where necessary;
- . development of new uses of language in order to articulate perceptions, understandings and insights;
- . completion of projects, in which the choice of topics and the motivation come largely from the students themselves;
- . sensitivity to signs of mood and feeling;
- . interaction with works written for a different kind of society and in a different idiom from the student's own;
- . response in formats other than the traditional discursive or critical essay.

According to the booklet, there were three main parts to be studied: set texts (including a Shakespeare play, another play, a novel and a collection of poems), coursework texts (plus a folder with essays and an extended essay on a chosen literature topic - counting for 20% of the total), prose and poetry extracts for examination. Entry requirements were GCSE grade C or above in English and three others at C or above; a written 'taster' was also asked of candidates prior to

their being accepted. The option for a syllabus with (then) 50% coursework and 50% examination papers can be quite revealing, as Harber states, since

‘[c]oursework gave (the pupils) responsibility for their own learning and enabled them to see how everything they did contributed to a final assessment. It promoted flexibility of outlook, co-operation and originality’.<sup>6</sup>

In general, observing lessons at the college was a less constrained experience, with students engaged in apparently interactive exchange with supportive teachers communicating on reciprocal basis and making use of creative approaches and strategies. As expected, though, each of the teachers observed had their own teaching style and strategies, demanding different responses from their classes. However, after having observed and interviewed teachers and students, I was able to find a strong contradiction in the libertarian discourse of the college teachers, when confronted with the practice of training students in a model which involves a particular kind of text reviewing and argumentation as the referendum for literary knowledge, failing to bring to light its requirements and working methods. Would this denial of a clear process and its final product be part of the intrinsic mechanism of control in the educational macro-system?

To those teachers and students, what seems to be the role of literature as a subject of study - an awareness process, an aesthetic value, language practice, a source of political ideas, a ferment for social changes? How democratic is, then, a personalised literary pedagogy based upon individual teaching modes? Besides, I was only made aware of the wide social, cultural and economic gap between students’ habitus and their teachers’ by interviewing students. Such gap was constantly present in literature classes, either in verbal utterances, or in cultural activities which marked out middle-class affinities and affiliations.

a. Mark invited me for a chat in the sun, unhurriedly, although time was up; he explained that, not being punctual himself, he never demanded punctuality from his students either. His lower-sixth class lesson started half an hour after due time. He also explained that, although there were fourteen students enrolled, only half were usually present. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> May there were six, five female and a male student, arranged in two groups which interacted throughout the lesson. Mark

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<sup>6</sup> Clive Harber (1992) *Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy: Education for Active Citizenship*, p. 8. The author is quoting from The Guardian newspaper of 3 December 1991.

asked me to introduce myself, and afterwards they started work on Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*, which the girls had utterly rejected (prior to reading, according to Mark) as a 'male' text about football. They also discussed the marking system, the coursework, the essays already written and those still to be handed in. Mark advised students *to play the examiners' game*, and recommended that *they should read an awful lot*. They seemed a hard-working group. The next task was to write about Hornby's book, based on four questions; also two titles were given for an 800-word essay. All students chose to do the third question, trying to create an imaginary character with an obsession; they also discussed the essay titles together and unhurriedly. Mark corrected no one, directed no one. He presented questions, problems, leaving to the students to try and solve them. As discussion evolved, he started making notes on the board, to register the opposing points-of-view for further reflection.<sup>7</sup> Then they concluded that the story was not as 'patchy' as they had anticipated, and made a special reference to the chapter about Pelé and Brazilian football, trying to include me in the discussion. After mid-morning break, discussion resumed about the *male psyche*, schooling, the class system in England, textual irony and then they engage in written work. Students looked relaxed and at ease throughout the lesson. I viewed four more lessons with Mark's group.

b. With sixteen students (only two male), Pennie's had been described by Mark as a 'very middle-class group'. Pennie started by doing most of the talking, in the final analysis of a war poem; she gave guiding rules for essay writing, asking students *to go through the lines, underlining key words in them and not wasting time*. She also emphasised the use of a 'spidergram' in their planning, and then, perhaps a bit self-consciously for sounding excessively concerned about the examinations, she apologised, saying that *that was not only what she meant*, although she did worry about working under time pressure on unknown texts. She asked if they had any doubts, allowing them time to think; she recommended *lots of reading, lots of noting and then lots of reading again, not worrying about what is not relevant to the question, using the text as basis*. After she returned the

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<sup>7</sup>He wrote: Diary: dates/ small sections/ personal. Newspaper: tabloid/ simple, chatty/ titles suggestive & humorous. Humour: self-deprecating/ football more important than women. Irony: saying something but not really meaning it. Growing up: insecure/ relationship with society & family.

marked essays, Pennie distributed sheets of work for students to choose between doing two songs from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* or a poem by Dannie Abse. A student asked if that Abse was *Terry's father*; he was.

The class was then divided into four groups; the group I was sitting next to was doing the songs, and I was naturally included in the discussion. Before checking, Pennie gave them a two-page hand-out about 'Doing unseen poems'. She asked them if they had found it useful, and asked them to make personal notes. Pennie told them to *underline the key words in the passage*, stressing that *although examiners ask one to explore a poem in a personal way, e.g., 'in any way you wish', they add that 'you may find helpful to consider the following', which is the clue to what they really want you to do: You've got to keep it in the straight and narrow*. She emphasised the difference between structure and style and mocked the use of 'may' in the exams headings, saying that *examiners are kind enough to allow you freedom, but just remind you of... So, do not start talking about when you visited your grandfather and... as they are not interested in it*.

Pennie treated texts and students with a firm hand; however, all the work was done by the students without much dictating or annotating, and decisions seemed to be made together. As the class got more and more involved in the work set, the level of noise went up. The group I was sitting with had three girls and one boy; we examined both songs, trying to define attitudes to love, mood and style differences, rhyme and rhythm appropriateness. We found it difficult to determine the style, and Pennie rescued us with 'indices', leading discussion to a deeper level. I presented a feminist reading, which the group accepted and used in the general discussion. I took part as an observer in four more lessons in Pennie's same group.

c. At 9.15 there were ten students in Rose's lower-sixth class, although fifteen were registered, all female. As two more arrived, Rose got clearly upset, as every entrance disrupted the lesson. At 9.25 she did not allow any latecomers anymore, and students were visibly annoyed by her scolding: *it is rude not to be punctual, it is just rude manners*. Later they would complain that Rose often treated them like children, unlike other college teachers. But she was very clear about her rules and classroom strategies, and demanded absolute attention and silence.



Rose distributed copies of *Jane Eyre* and *Beloved* and set the task to read each first chapter for comparison, as preparation for work on unseen texts. After a while, Rose asked a student to start reading the first book, but after a few lines, she herself took over; then the first chapter of *Beloved* was read. A student was writing a private note, and Rose scolded her publicly and rather impatiently. The class was separated in smaller groups by Rose, who even determined each group's composition; although not happy about her direct guidance, they simply obeyed.<sup>8</sup> Rose went around helping groups to determine characteristics of each text, and students got immersed in their texts. Rose made and set the rules, but students found her competent and fair. She said she was committed to their learning through action, and after brainstorming with the whole class, she asked a few comprehension questions, while also urging them to find deeper issues. When she felt they had done enough, she praised their effort, their findings, and turned to writing techniques, jotting down their basic contributions on the board. During break she told me she made use of a mixture of feminist, post-structuralist and pedagogical theories. The rest of the afternoon was spent on writing an essay about Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood*, which had been previously dealt with. Rose's students were not able to find their way to get started, and Rose finally got impatient and asked if they wanted a 'spidergram' (a circular drawing with the main elements to compose the essay) on the board. With that schema they at last felt able to set to work. I returned to Rose's group for four more lessons.

### **Classroom approaches and strategies**

After observing the above described classrooms, it has been possible to identify the teaching strategies which appeared through classroom strategies, founded on pre-established aims. They were:

- . expressive reading: performed by the teacher, it aims at developing listening/ reading skills which can facilitate concentration on textual elements;
- . literal explanation of textual difficulties by the teacher, a time-saving selection of authority-validated vocabulary and structures, implying what is or should be common knowledge; except for the college, students were not often expected or welcome to ask further questions;

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<sup>8</sup> This was very different from the experience of reading T. Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* described by Boerckel et al, using Freirean methodologies for student empowerment; results achieved were equally distinct. Boerckel & Barnes (1991) 'Defeating the Banking Concept of Education', p. 7

- . analysis of linguistic and literary resources by the teacher, from whom knowledge and wisdom emanates;
- . critical analysis of text through students' essay-writing prompted by the teacher, a practice founded upon constant re-writing aiming at students *writing more and better essays*, which becomes written evidence of the organisation of teacher-provided data;
- . oral summing-up, further references and exam implications through teacher's comments on essays; such feedback emphasises, among other issues, the acquiescent reproduction of multifarious values.

Straw & Bogdan recognise the usual approaches in literature teaching, depending on the aims stressed by different strategies, as translation, transmission, interaction and transaction. In order to make the strategies clear, I should say that most classrooms observed used the translation approach, centred on the written contents, valuing specific linguistic-literary information and actually 'translating' texts into orally abridged language, to facilitate comprehension. Almost as frequently seen - and sometimes used in combination with it - was the transmission approach, highlighting the author's moral and cultural values, plus historical information, the classics and the Bible. The transaction approach aimed at socio-political interaction between readers, readers and texts, teachers and students, but was rarely seen in practice, as well as the interaction approach<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the habitual lesson structure was characterised by an emphasis on conventional practices of reading skills, by examination-biased determination of textual difficulties by the teacher, by teacher's explanation of vocabulary, structures, metaphors and hidden meanings, by an emphasis on cognition and quantification of knowledge, measured

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<sup>9</sup>The terms *translation*, *transmission* and *transaction* are used by Straw and Bogdan (1990) related to literature pedagogy. They say that it is at the 'point of instruction' that teachers help students towards reading sensitivity, 'to understand the events in their lives' in a constructive and collaborative process (p 2). The reading theories that support this contract are founded on Louise Rosenblatt's transactional process, in which 'reading is built up by the reader during the act of reading', notions of transaction and construction which focus on 'the social construction of knowledge - education as a communal pursuit'. Straw and Bogdan believe them to be connected with Vygotsky's sociopsychology (language comprehension developed as a result of its social use); in the classroom, students can negotiate meaning both with text and with members of different interpretive communities mainly through situations which privilege social interaction (pp 4-5). The 'translation' practice: readers as puzzle solvers, translating the meaning of the (reified) text through their own "skill". The other approaches are: 'transmission' (meaning resided with the author, text merely viewed as a vehicle for the author's meaning; a knowledge about the author's life is of ultimate importance), 'interaction' (text less visible, author gains some prominence, the reader gains importance, and reading becomes problem-solving, with an increased importance of knowledge about the "sign" system), and the 'transactional' (enhances the importance of the reader in the act of reading, decreasing the importance placed on either the author or the text; a reader's actualisation act, more than communication; he is active in the reconstruction of the text) (pp 15-17)

in note-taking and by students' body language expressing passivity, boredom, sometimes unease and self-consciousness.

According to Barnes' classification of classroom approaches, above described, excepting the Inner-city college, all the lessons viewed enforced the 'transmission' approach. At the college, students were expected to interact actively, to make propositions, to contribute to the literary reading and analysis, whereas in every other classroom viewed, students limited their action to a passive listening to the teacher, and to annotating hints, translations and bits of information on their books. However, socio-cultural gaps and contradictions between teachers and taught, between methods and contents, prevented true initiation, cultural recognition and democratic empowerment at the college. For instance, the absence of clear theoretical foundation, as well as the lack of critical theories made those students dependent on Rose's 'spidergram' on the board.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Terry Eagleton (1989) - 'a literary education does not exactly encourage analytical thought'; literary theory has been accused of getting 'in between the reader and the work'; Eagleton states that 'without some kind of theory, however unreflective and implicit, we would not know what a "literary work" was in the first place, or how we were to read it' (preface to *Literary Theory: an Introduction*).

## ***SECTION C: Listening to the Subjects***

### **Modes of teaching**

This thesis is an attempt to answer three questions, which are the origin of this study:

*what are the purposes of teaching and studying literature?*

*what is the present social role of literature education in schools?*

*how can we empower social subjects in literature classrooms?*

To do so, it is necessary to understand in what ways the process of educating through literature represents the societies it is inserted in. In the previous section I described the classrooms observed in England. My aim is to allow the subjects involved to voice their habitus, projects, dilemmas, aims, difficulties, and the limits which they recognise as imposed by the system as a whole. Through Sue, Pete, Mark, Pennie and Rose, and their students, I will attempt to draw a profile of the social background for literature education in England.

### ***Teachers' habitus and practices***

In asking interviewees about their upbringing, and the routes they followed before becoming teachers of literature, I was looking for an accurate definition of their habitus. The differences among the five teachers from the home-county school and the Inner-city college were more marked in terms of their political commitments, as their literary upbringing and professional routes presented few surprises, and in fact, more similarities than differences. All of them acknowledged the importance of the 'home library', even in the case of Sue, the only teacher coming from a working-class family, whose 'home library' was 'just round the corner':

there were no books in the house, except for a couple of encyclopaedias. But we had a library at the top of the road and I was an only child and a lonely child and I was a voracious reader

which she saw as a lasting influence on her literary habitus, on her knowing 'a bit of everything', an essential feature of her teaching practice. All the other teachers said that they had highly schooled parents, and a variety of literary books in their middle-class homes.

Their perception of literary matters as A-level teachers, however, presented interesting variations, helping to identify some academic stances and dilemmas. Mark, whose classroom performance had so much impressed me, surprisingly confided his absolute lack of self-confidence, because not only of his training in film studies, but also for '*the masses of poetry*' he had never read. Pennie seemed to stoop to teach literature, which she described as '*an indulgence rather than a job*', having trained as a social worker first. Pete said he had resisted becoming a teacher of literature, having tried '*a variety of jobs first*'. Only Rose seemed to have opted for literature from the start, with a specific training which included a master's degree in African Literature. Sue had graduated as a mature student, in her late thirties, after struggling over whether she should teach English or religion'.

Although all the teachers, except for Sue, said that they came from middle-class backgrounds, there were a great many similarities between Sue's and Pete's views of students, of literature, and society in general. In a sense, it could be said that their working environment had acted in a pre-selective way, hiring professionals who were ready to abide by rules imbued with implicitly set values. For instance, they seemed to believe in the character-enhancing quality of literature, through whose 'rounding-up effects' students could become 'better persons', for instance<sup>11</sup>. They also seemed to hold a deterministic view of literature, tending to bar those students who '*had atrocious spelling*', for example, as not fit for it.

Rather than a subject of learning, literature in Sue's and Pete's views appeared to be a matter of personal and social inclination. Their similarities were visible also in the field of political views and opinions, in macro (society, school) and micro-politics (classroom interaction, exchanges and valuation). Without the ethnic and social diversity experienced elsewhere, most politico-economical issues at the home county became distanced from the urgency of inner-city everyday life. Thus, while Pete seemed unaware of political demonstrations going on in London at that time, against the October 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill,

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<sup>11</sup>Eagleton (1989) writes that the liberal humanist response is not weak because it believes in the transformative role of literature; its weakness, however, is to grossly overestimate this transformative power, considered isolatedly from any determining social context; to become 'a better person' is taken 'in the most narrow and abstract of terms'. Op cit., p 207

which he arguably concluded not to be 'strictly relevant' to his classroom work, Sue was at ease to use a garden-'cleansing' argument for the Bill: *'I'm quite in favour of it if it stops these grundgy people stepping on other people's gardens and things'*, unaware of the socio-political limits imposed by it on the population as a whole.

Sue's and Pete's pedagogical habitus indicated a view of literature as a 'difficult-to-teach' subject, substantial, heavy and placed in a superior sphere of comprehension, hardly accessible to the average student, while also an end-in-itself school subject distanced from social, cultural and political mediation. Sue complained about students' general ignorance of *'fairly basic words'* in literary texts, their lack of 'etymological curiosity', and general laziness. Her final comment exemplified the generalised belief held by many teachers that nowadays students' level of conceptual knowledge and reading performance had lowered, compared with their past middle-class clientele.<sup>12</sup> Whereas literary pedagogies at the home-county school were centred on epochs and genres, styles and interpretative meanings, vocabulary enlargement, and the *bits and pieces* of historical and biographical information connected to literary texts, the college teachers stated that they tackled politics in a consistent and permanent manner. Mark, for instance, mentioned racism, sexism, the imposition of taste and the canon as part of literature education, saying that he and his colleagues 'deliberately bring issues on sexuality and gender' into their classrooms, raising some occasional reactionary replies ('but we did get two middle-class male students say *thank God I've finished studying literature so I won't have to read another black, female writer*'), and Rose simply stated that *'if you are teaching literature it is difficult to ignore political issues'*. Only Pennie evaded the question.

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<sup>12</sup> W. Waller (1967) op cit., p. 212, presents a number of heads which point to traits known to affect teacher's prestige and his /her ability to control the classroom situation: age, social background, physical characteristics, dress, manners, manner, attitude toward students and subject matter, voice, expression of features, tempo of reactions, range of mental personality, and the nature of the organization of the personality (complexity, stability, etc.). The author relates age to social experience, poise, maturity, which enable teachers to maintain social distance from their students; the social background is apparent to students, affecting their attitude to him/her: teachers' cultural attainment should be above the average level of the community; physical traits, dress, manners and manner all refer to social background, and so on. In general, Waller states that 'it is necessary for a teacher to control the mood of a group' (p 233). Equally important is 'the amount of knowledge and wisdom of the teacher', which affects his prestige in a quite irrational way. However, Waller reminds readers that 'every hardened veteran of the classroom knows that the real problem is to get students to take the responsibility for their own education' (p 243).

Eagleton writes that 'no work, and no current evaluation of it, can simply be extended to new groups of people without being changed, perhaps almost unrecognisably, in the process; and this is one reason why what counts as literature is a notably unstable affair'<sup>13</sup>. Cantarow argues that literature, as presently taught, becomes 'a means of preserving professional privilege, of justifying the bureaucratic procedures that ensure privilege' at the university. As a consequence, it is used as 'a tool to impose on students the ideologies of classes in power'. A strong case is the apology of liberal ideology which states that 'literature enriches one's life', thus becoming 'an adornment, an isolable unit that confirms the sterility of life under capitalism'<sup>14</sup>. This emerged very clearly in Sue's and Pete's discourses about the role of literature. While Sue felt literature was 'an absolutely enriching area to complement getting a job, as books round the person, give her depth and a fullness...', Pete said he believed that literature was important for 'the pleasure, enjoyment and fulfilment you get from it'.

All of the teachers viewed themselves as 'classroom workers', except for Pete, who believed he had an academic mind, and saw himself as a scholar rather than a teacher. He did not seem personally and professionally fulfilled by school teaching, and aimed at lecturing at university and doing research. Comparing herself to Pete, Sue concluded she was definitely a teacher, because '*what I want to do is learn the pieces and little things... [research]'s not my style, I haven't got the time and the stamina for it... I hate planning my lessons'*.

Lesson planning was a relevant issue to show differences between Sue's and in Pete's practices. Sue's self-image as a school teacher, with little possibility of academic upgrading due to her 'personal characteristics', was linked to her feeling stuck in a job she considered 'thankless'. For instance, commenting upon her students' career choices, she said:

... nobody's put down English. It's a thankless job, and the prospects for any... I mean, I'd like to teach in a... no, I haven't got the confidence...Pete would like to teach in a... (university?) college, in further education, but the chances of getting in are slim, unless you've done something in depth, research, and published a thesis or something... and oh, I don't want to do that. I'm not a...(she giggles)

Her relationship with literature seemed to be one of strangeness, difficulty, and distance, which she anticipated and shared with her students. For instance:

<sup>13</sup>T. Eagleton, op cit. p 12

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Cantarow: 'Why teach literature?', in Kampf & Lauter (eds.) The Politics of Literature: Dissenting Essays on the Teaching of English (1973), p.91

I started doing that with the easiest and simplest poems to break them in gently because things like 'In Memoriam' and 'Locksley Hall' are very daunting, so I thought if we just did easier ones and then got on to the sinful ones with an easy story line... I myself would hate to sit down and research anything in horrendous depth, with footnotes and bibliography and things... especially educational theory, oh God, I hate it! What I want to do is learn the pieces and little things, it's not my style...

Sue's lesson planning, an activity she classified as *hateful*, consisted, according to herself, of studying cribs and footnotes, plus getting extra 'bits and pieces' collected at random, directed by her 'wide knowledge of things' accumulated along the career, and which probably aided her in the so-called acting scene (*....that's what there is, [teaching]'s really like acting, isn't it?*). Pete said he liked to plan his lessons very accurately, '*so as not to be caught by the students without knowing something*'. As a young, white, middle-class male teacher aiming at academic scholarship, Pete denied any connection between literature and current issues, and with other forms of cultural representation<sup>15</sup>, reading, or learning. Literature's role was to improve middle-class manners, taste and standards.

Mark defined his lesson planning as 'half-termly sections of what we are going to study and what we are going to cover'. He justified his choice of set texts for coursework by telling an authoritarian joke ('*because I like it*' (*laughter*); *it is a good enough reason*'), even though his interaction with students seemed to be far from it. Trying to explain the foundation of his teaching, Mark said:

I always use the same thing really, I use narrative theory. I look at Teodor (sic) Todorov and actually explain about it to students. (...) Cause I think books, you can see them as something interesting, or definitely trying to be different when they move away from basic narrative structure, and things that don't move away are just playing with being radical, I think narrative structure underpins it...

His answer to my question about the usual absence of theoretical support in literature teaching was ambivalent and, as most literature teachers, Mark also proposed an 'instinctive approach' to substitute for the theoretical vacuum, and minimised the importance of the theoretical foundation I had imagined he used in his classes, stressing note-taking as the central strategy for 'good' essay-writing.

About her professional routine, Rose said:

(...)I like to have lessons with a lot of different activities going on because I think students need that, they need to be turned on to literature in a way. So I think planning and preparation to me is more important than marking. So I spend enough time... yes, I spend more time probably thinking about that than actually doing the marking, I mark

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<sup>15</sup>T Eagleton (1989), op cit. p 15, defined *ideology* as 'those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power'.



quite quickly, I'm a fast marker, which means to me preparation is paramount. Looking at different ways to get the students involved in the text.

And to my question about the use of theories and theoretical criticism in literature education, Rose justified the classroom approach practised at the college in an ampler, deeper and more consistent way.

I think there's a general sort of osmosis that happened over the past few years with criticism... texts being looked at in a different way, the idea of having different readings rather than just one reading... And I suppose we in a way in the department we sort of encourage people to take on that, so that students begin to see that a text in a way does its own writing, it's not just what the writer, the author intended it to be, and you can have different interpretations, provided you can have your point through coherently. So I think encouraging different readings in a text is important, so if you like you can see it from a socialist or a communist angle, or from a traditionalist critical angle, bring up debate about whether there is such thing as great literature, I think that's important... look at genre in literature so they decide that an idea, at least for their own individual studies they can use the popular fiction as well as the sort of classic text.

I asked Rose how clear the approaches were made to the students, as I wanted to get a sense of the extent to which Mark's intuitive approach was generalised. Still, once again, when students were brought to the fore of theoretical matters, issues were inevitably related to examination criteria, and Rose stated that theories were simply restricted to a choice of genres as an approach to essay-writing (*'in their long essay they can opt for the detective genre, for instance'*), while literary knowledge and awareness were expected to come from individual writing practice.

Pennie raised two very important points. The first was that students end up learning from practice and peer work, without any clarification of argument; simply, *'they get to know what it is that you want'*. The second point was that the whole exercise of literature studying was described by a teacher with a good reputation, working in a serious and successful institution, as *'writing bigger, better and more essays'...* *'because they've got to write'* and, ultimately, do well in the exams. I suppose this requires a redefinition of the discipline's boundaries, methods, theories and strategies. Pennie also explained what an error in literature studies was, showing concern with language norms through a communicative approach:

Sometimes they quote wrong... they think they can prove a plot for you: 'he tells that he loves her: *I love you*', we don't need a quote there. You need a quote when you want the reader of your essay to look at the language and you want to point out something about the language... So they need to learn why they're using textual reference, some of them... some of them know already... Sometimes the essay is a muddle and it doesn't read well, and they need to know how to plan, even if they're just going to plan quickly in their head...

Sometimes, occasionally, we'll spoon-feed them a plan, what we would expect it to cover... and actually if they write a paragraph on each of those things they have a good essay. Sometimes you get an essay back and say would you write down what strange plan this essay seems to have followed, and I'll see that it is a complete... It keeps leaping around and jumping around and they needed to sort things out, just so that it comes out...

At this point of the interview, as we had started discussing real-life literature education, the initial wandering about values, truth and self-knowledge was being replaced with language and structure problems, which become the relevant issues in everyday practice. The structural secret of good essay writing was then uncovered: a plan of paragraphs covering essential items. What, then, to make of such contradiction? It must be mentioned that, at that point of the interview, Pennie suddenly started to show unease and haste, whereas so far she had seemed relaxed and unhurried.

Mark's personal representation of socio-political issues was problematized when I asked his political profile, and how it appeared in his practice.

... that's going back to the way I was taught in the late seventies early eighties, where you believed that every action had an ideological basis, even if you don't believe and try to be non-political, that's still a political statement about what you do, and that's very definite. I try not to let it [influence my teaching]. I'd rather play devil's advocate than fall for a political line. I think the discussion about different people is... in other words, I think we make students think there's always more than one answer, that's really what I suppose I try to do.

Pennie called herself 'a social animal, rather than political', whereas Rose said:

For example, teaching black literature, Caribbean literature, Asian literature, whatever, it's interesting for students to look at whether there is such a concept as third-world literature, what that means... And look at the effects of colonialism in literature. And books, poems, etc. rising against colonialism. I mean that one general theme that runs through quite a lot of the books we study is the sort of imperialistic, anti-imperialistic theme, it comes in there, comes in with looking at some of the American literature we do: Miller, Tennessee Williams, I suppose, sexual politics and I think in his work he is underlying challenges to sort of the status quo.

### ***Teachers' politico-pedagogical dilemmas***

When Pennie described her own feelings and initial response to tackling literature professionally, she talked about literature as 'an indulgence, rather than a job', and the steps it took her before deciding that she should teach literature. To opt for a career initially rejected as 'intellectually little challenging' seemed to suggest a conflict which is still latent, and related to Pennie's professional and intellectual self-esteem. After all, she only embarked on literature teaching after

experiencing the challenge of teaching at Inner-city schools, a *difficulty* which may have satisfied her 'sense of duty'.

Pennie's interaction with her students had seemed quite balanced in terms of democratic opportunities to speak, and to ask. In my next viewing, when she seemed more at ease, however, she did most of the talking in the classrooms, providing her definitive interpretation of texts, structures and meanings as final, in spite of a friendly and socially open relationship with the students. But there still seemed to be more teaching than learning. My impression was confirmed later, during the interviews, when students suggested they might learn better if their cultural reasoning and understanding of texts were judged more relevant, and extra-class inferences were less related to middle-class values, which excluded them, as already pointed out.

Pennie explained that the idea founding sixth-form literature was 'to develop their own response', and her role was to help with the 'language of their response'. At the beginning of our conversation she insisted on the intuitive personal-response mode; however, as I asked for a definition of methods and critiques, she finally left the 'personal response' argument aside and conceded that 'there is a pattern', without clarifying the theoretical grounds, methodological approaches, or specific strategies, other than trial-and-error, and peer work:

Yes, there is a pattern, it's a lie to say they can respond to it in any way... But also if the students work in groups you can sort of... fit... I think students feel a bit supported by their friends, and they can tell each other how they are going to plan it... do that... or read each other's essays or... I mean I think that they get to know what is it that you want... [they will become independent to write their essays for the exams] by writing bigger and better and more essays not for the exams, do you see what I mean? (...) Not just practising for the exams, they're writing essays because they've got to write. And I think that the purpose of re-drafting... helps them to see the problems they make in first drafts as well, so it helps them to actually produce stuff in the exams...

With a strong classroom performance, Rose demanded active participation and contribution from students, a crucial demand when aiming for democratic empowerment. However, when some students arrived late, she was visibly annoyed, and used an argument which was rather sensitive in a multicultural environment: she accused them of lack of 'proper manners'. Being the only college teacher interviewed who had had a literary training, Rose defined her classroom approach as a combination of post-structuralist, deconstructionist and pedagogical critiques, without determining the result of such mixture.

Deconstruction, for example, has been defined as 'a powerful expression used to describe a critical practice that rejects the traditional idea that assumes literary texts to be *structures of determinate meaning accessible by objective critical procedures*', making it impossible to find a *full* meaning<sup>16</sup> not to be fixed by time, or by the book's boundaries; for Derrida, the text is 'a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself'<sup>17</sup>. Thus, if there is no final point of analysis, deconstruction is a literary practice which allows no assessment, or grading of students' responses to literary texts. Such *interrogation* of the text includes practices and structures of political representation, beyond the linguistic structure, 'but the ideological, philosophical, economic, and historical practices of the text'<sup>18</sup>. They are political representations because they involve power and discourse. Post-structuralism, in its turn, is based on the denial of oppositional pairs, the binarity which founded structuralism. Besides, I could not understand exactly what Rose meant by pedagogical critique applied to literature, nor the threefold product on which she based her practice.

Literary practices at school seemed to hide the implicit rules of behaviour and socio-cultural differences which only became visible to me through the interviews, revealing unstated dilemmas and comprehension gaps between teachers' middle-class language (such as 'philistine', which most students ignored, but were afraid to ask), habits (taking for granted that students simply needed the 'will' to attend theatrical performances) and students' working-class values, even in the less constrained ambience of the Inner-city college.

Mark's central dilemma was apparently related to the role of classroom authority he was expected to exercise; his own difficulty in being punctual was used as a political issue, for instance, by allowing students to arrive late and by starting his lessons half an hour behind time. This created a conflict with Rose, who treated punctuality as a matter of 'proper manners'. There also seemed to be an ambiguity in Mark's stated effort *to cover everything* pedagogically (and his use of the department's filing cabinets) and his self-imposed laid-back approach to teaching. He also described the 'freedom' of views at the college (*'individualism is*

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<sup>16</sup> David Birch *Language, Literature and Critical Practice* (Interface Series), London: Routledge, p. 8

<sup>17</sup> D. Birch, *Language, Literature...* (op cit.), p. 9; citing J. Derrida (1979) 'Living on', p 84

<sup>18</sup> D. Birch, op cit., p 13

*treasured rather than discouraged or laughed at, giving students a confidence that... if they express a different viewpoint it won't be dismissed, or even told it is wrong'),* without perceiving that the majority of ordinary students were not secure enough of their literary knowledge and writing competence to challenge the system by writing an essay about Lawrence and football, such as the example he gave. The social, economic and cultural gap encountered daily in literature classes seemed to go unnoticed by teachers in general. For that reason, it seems of capital importance to understand how students are to be empowered towards a satisfactory practice for social and self-transformation, and how democratic aims are to be achieved, if practices rely basically on intuition and individuality.

Sue considered one complicated issue the absence of selective rigour in the acceptance of students at literature sixth form. To her, the achievement of good results in A-level exams proved the competence of students, teachers, departments and schools and their ability to perform by examining boards' *demanding standards*. She gave an indication that it was also a crucial mediating element in the school's financial management. In Pete's view, the ideal situation would be to *'have students really committed to literature, keen on passing their exams and working hard, especially doing homework and extra work'*. So, at least for the home-county school literature teachers, students (*'the laid-back approach of the children... the difficulties in getting them to produce their homework on time'* - Pete) seemed to be the main drawback in their routine, difficult opponents to be dealt with through the strategy of *silence* (Pete) or of *affectionate* dedication (Sue), while priority was given to the accomplishment of an objective task placed outside social subjects: to deliver the syllabus and guarantee a majority of successful passes in the examinations.

While Bourdieu warns against the apparent determination of present actions by the future<sup>19</sup>, in Sue and Pete's cases it seemed that their own personal

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<sup>19</sup> 'If [agents] seem determined by anticipation of their own consequences, thereby encouraging the finalist illusion, the fact is that, always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, they are determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production, that is, by the actual outcome of identical or interchangeable past practices, which coincides with their own outcome to the extent that the objective structures of which they are the product are prolonged in the structures within which they function'. [...] 'The habitus is the source of these series of moves which are objectively organized as strategies without being the product of a genuine strategic intention - which would presuppose at least that they are perceived as one strategy among other possible strategies' (pp 72-73, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*)

histories, the historical culture surrounding literature as a discipline (the past), together with the culture privileged by the milieu they inhabited professionally (at present), helped to understand the consistence of their practice, which was projected onto future evaluation. The denial of overt political conflict was fundamental to the orchestrated achievement of the Hollybush community's goals. No one - teachers or students - showed overt concern with wider issues, and even polemical news was treated as distant reading material. An example of this was Sue's commenting on a piece of news she had photocopied and handed out to her students, without having read or discussed it with them in class.

No, this was just a one-off. It wasn't directly involved with anything we were doing, but it made a lot of fairly controversial statements about the attitude of the modern teenager, schoolchildren, and how they have been taught, and how they have responded... And I just wanted to interest them for a minute, there wasn't time, I did not want to mark an essay on it, I didn't want even to discuss it, I just wanted them to read it, and something in the article might just have triggered off something in their minds for an essay in the exam or something; you never know...

I'm thinking of when they go for the interviews, especially for Oxbridge, the examiners want somebody with a bit of a spark, a bit of knowledge of what is going on in the world... something to say which are your own opinions, rather than just the narrow confines of the texts that they are studying...

The demands of 'time' drive pedagogical action in sixth form, and as a common excuse for political omissions, in itself it functions as a powerful element of control. Interest and dedication to a topic or a piece of written material assume the form of 'marking an essay'. There seems to be a gradation of decreasing values from 'marking an essay', and then 'even to discuss it', and 'to read it', to 'to trigger off something in their minds'. Pete, for instance, said that if students brought an extra (current political) issue for discussion, he would just ask them to talk about it on their own, after the literature lesson was over, in order to avoid wasting precious, scarce time. I surmise that a political article, with its non-literary language, would not be judged as a contribution to the rounding-up of his students' personalities; additionally, his expert image might be scratched, as all sorts of unexpected questions might appear in a freer context of political discussions, for which he might not have been 'prepared'.

I was expecting Rose to clarify the theories and methods related to the ultimate aims declared in the college's booklet when I asked her how students became pedagogically and conceptually independent. She said:

Well, I think doing the independent studies, doing the long essays is a very important part of that, they start reading for that in the second term of their first year, and it's handed in in the first term of the second year, so it's about a six-month process and

working on books of their own choice on their own encourages their independence, I think.

(Are they explicit? Do they use the theories? Are they supposed to use them in the exams?)

I think the exam is open enough to allow responses, provided they are text-based. And I think students can be quite open... I mean some questions on the exam paper actually point in that direction, to some extent.

How Mark and Pennie dealt with their personal and professional habitus before their multiethnic, mainly working-class literature students was another point of difference between them. Mark's image of literature students in general could be described as quite romantic, in the sense that he saw them as 'raw material' to be moulded and civilised by the heroic teacher of literature (someone other than himself).

And I remember when I was on my very first year of teaching, the head of English said... [a teacher of literature] used to teach poetry brilliantly, to really hard-nosed kids, really really rough students, outside school virtually uncontrollable, literally roving the streets, causing havoc, ... It was the only subject that the entire class got a grade at, I mean for some of them, it was the only grade, English and English literature, that she taught them. And everyone of them wrote this poem, they had to write poems for 'the wolf inside me'. They had to write... a lot of them spent ages on it, A.J. loves poetry, and loves writing poetry and she just communicated that enthusiasm whereas until I came here students were more acceptable to poetry.

As described in Chapter One, such requirements for literature become questionable in the sense that they demand a personally, academically, artistically and pedagogically gifted individual teacher whose rapport with a determined class of students favours such activities. It reinforces the figure of individual heroes instead of aiming for a category of professionals well equipped to teach literature successfully, as a relevant discipline which must also contribute to effective social, cultural and political awareness. Next, it creates an even wider gap between lower (aiming at obtaining a creative response) and upper school (aiming at critical essay-writing), between middle-class and working-class students, who at sixth form will be required to prove intellectual comprehension of the literary artefact without previous preparation. The cultural distance between students from different social classes may reinforce the separation between them on the basis of literary aptitude and sensibility.

The problem with Pennie was deeply settled in social class values. She assumed an average of 70% working-class students in her lower-sixth group, and although acknowledging that '*class is a difficult thing to...*', she did not seem in fact to deal with multicultural and multi-social issues in her practice. It seemed ironic,

given her politically marked discourse, and the fact that she had a degree in sociology and politics, that Pennie was the college teacher apparently least concerned about social, economic and cultural gaps and contradictions in her practice. This became evident by interviewing her students.

Rose attributed her main difficulties to students' lack of commitment, of motivation to literature, allied to their lack of reading experience. She summed up her role as a teacher of literature as *'dealing with the weaker students and trying to get them to really enjoy the subject and to want to read for themselves and to want to begin to see the underlying meanings in texts...'* However, when she explained what she saw as the objectives and the profile of literature at the college, she identified literary reading basically as a 'motif', the means towards the goal of essay writing:

The A-level literature course we do, predominantly... it is response to literature, but there is creative writing within it, because you know, we're using literature as a stimulus for the students' own writing.

In fact, Rose defined what was expected from literature students at A level, as implying a response to literature, creative writing, and the use of literature as a stimulus for textual production. Preparation for that, according to Mark in his interview, was done by the good teaching of literature at secondary school. What he did not seem to acknowledge was that, according to students themselves, they had entered sixth form unprepared for what was expected of them in terms of the amount of reading to be done, as well as the so-called 'commitment' to literature which he exemplified. He went on to say: *I mean, secondary schools teach English very well and in very difficult conditions, I mean we have nicer conditions, so we look to be more successful, but we're really just building over good practice.*

As a whole, five white, middle-class (by birth or habitus) teachers presented syllabus-related variations in their classroom practices. At the home-county school, an all-white, middle-class milieu, the English department had opted for a syllabus with no coursework, thus concentrating their efforts on the 'close reading' and interpretation of set texts. Lessons were based on teachers' explicating strategies, dictating notes which students copied into their books, without any interactive strategies. Given the clientele's apparent socio-cultural uniformity, dilemmas and difficulties focused strictly on issues of commitment to literature, conceptual knowledge, dedication to studies. At the Inner-city college, a multiethnic, multicultural environment with a majority of working-class students, relations were



apparently more interactive and dynamic; yet, social class issues were left below surface level. The department option for an examining board which considered coursework as part of students' assessment seemed an indicator of predisposition towards students' participation and responsibility for their own evaluation process.

In general, the college profile signalled an openness of strategies, contents, and relationships, as well as the apparent acceptance of theoretical foundation, albeit uttered by teachers in uncompromised, non-emphatic fashion.

The process of interviewing teachers and students brought more surprises and discoveries at the College than at Hollybush. Although conflicts seemed to be ignored by teachers in both realms, at Hollybush they were circumscribed to complaints about passive strategies, the lack of pedagogical communication between teachers and taught, and the spoon-feeding which often characterises classroom practices based on explicit power control. At the College, however, problems lay on the level of social differences, creating a dormant resentment against contents, practices, and social representations. Although not overt, there was a great deal of spoon-feeding there as well.

### **Modes of learning**

In addition to observing lessons and interviewing teachers, listening to what students had to say complemented the triangulation of data I was aiming at. My questions attempted to achieve a realistic profile of students at both places, as well as to reach deeper levels, not immediately visible for external observers.

### **Students' profiles and views**

At Hollybush, literature classes had an average of twenty students, mostly female, and all white, who identified themselves as English middle class, the majority of whom coming from homes whose parents themselves had done English A levels. They had chosen literature either because they had done well at the General Certificate of Secondary Education exams, or because they enjoyed reading and/or writing. Literature was important for them for different reasons, all related to an upgrading of 'cultural knowledge', enriching their personal values, or acquiring a better understanding of British tradition. In general, Shakespeare was

approved of at Hollybush, with the exception of one student, who said there were 'too many words for too little substance' (Chris, in Pete's class). Hollybush students responded very differently to either teacher, and were critical of their practices for different reasons. Pete's approach was distanced from students, who resented it, but believed it was an attitude caused by his 'shyness', or youth. As a male, middle-class, white teacher, there was no reason to doubt his knowledge of the discipline, or his pedagogical competence to get them prepared for the exams.

They disliked the passivity, the formality, the spoon-feeding, the note dictating, but believed he ought to do things that way, because 'literature is very difficult'. Thus, while the first excerpt is critical, the second one, by the same students, adds an apologetic tone to the criticism, and raises an unexpected inverted gender issue.

(Excerpt 1, three male students in Pete's class)

1. ...a lot of it we are just being told what to do, we just sit there and take notes of what teachers say. I think most of it should be done with us sitting in groups and discussing with each other, because you see, we've got ideas... I think that would be better, otherwise we get so bored. Time doesn't pass...
2. ... I'd do it definitely more informal, because I feel really awkward in that class, I never say anything, I sit and keep quiet. But I think, and what I think is usually right, but I never say anything... I don't think it is the English way, because it all depends on the class...
1. Yes, I thought it would be more interesting. I thought I'd be doing different sorts of writing, not just critical essays; and I thought there would be lots of discussions, more discussions...
3. It is that he [Pete] doesn't make any discussions in his lessons either. He does not appreciate our abilities, he just wants information, and the only way he only assesses us is through our written work... I think there's more to it than simply written work. And... I don't think he knows us very well, I don't think he knows anyone.
2. You see, teachers don't really know anyone, they assume they know you, when they write things about you in your report, which are quite untrue.

(Excerpt 2, same group)

1. The work we do is very difficult, and we would not be able to do it on our own... You know, things are hard to understand... Like I mean ehr... the Truman Capote book we are doing at the moment... I'd do it just like you saw in there, with the teacher, I guess...
2. The other teacher's lessons are the worst possible... his lessons are just so boring, I just can't concentrate... everyone is sleepy... [if I were to teach literature] I'd liven it up a bit, I'd do more than just sit down and read all the way through the book... I'd have discussions, I think they are helpful. Ahn... I'd get them to read the book, instead of reading it in class, page by page...
3. ...and I'd give equal treatment to the boys in class. Because we are the only three boys in that class, and the teacher is only interested in the girls... I didn't know it was going to be like this, I thought I'd be doing different sorts of writing, not just critical essays; and I thought there would be lots of discussions, more discussions... We spent twelve weeks on one book, which is too long, really. We'll finish a two-year course having done what... seven or eight books, when we could've done a lot more.

Waller wrote that 'the teacher-pupil relationship is a form of institutionalised dominance and subordination', as they confront each other 'with an original conflict of desires': teachers represent the adult world, inimical to the spontaneous life of youth; they represent the formal curriculum, imposed through set tasks, while students 'are more interested in life in their own world than in the desiccated bits of adult life which teachers have to offer'; still, teachers represent 'the established social order in the school', and are interested in maintaining that order, 'whereas pupils have only a negative interest in that feudal superstructure'. Waller also wrote that as authority is on the side of the teacher, students must yield, as they are 'defenceless against the machinery with which the adult world is able to enforce its decisions'<sup>20</sup>.

A group of three girls confirmed the pedagogy of passive silence and limited thinking required in Pete's classes. They also rejected the uselessness of imposed discussion, which they opposed to the desired genuine exchange of ideas and reading views.

... the written things are interesting, but... the way they treat it that doesn't make it interesting... they don't make you think about it... you just sit there...  
 ... and you don't listen at all, you just sit there... You just think of something else!  
 They just think you're thinking about it, and that's the joke! It doesn't cost anything, you just struggle along it...  
 ... sometimes he doesn't know the answers, and you sit there and he waits for ages, and never discusses... the way he faces our questions, it just makes us...  
 ... at least he's not a fool like Mr J, who sometimes thinks if he allows us to have discussions, we will end up talking, and stuff... and he just doesn't do it... if he ever set a good question, we would end up discussing, getting involved in it...  
 ... because everyone has different ideas and you get to learn and understand the poems better...  
 ... he just forces too much and makes it too difficult, I mean, the words he uses!  
 We'd like to be less passive, a bit more. Discuss things, and then... if nobody knows, then he can tell us. But then, if you do know, you can have your own view and go on to the next thing!

Things were slightly different with Sue, white, female, with working-class origin, since her self-conscious manner did not seem to intimidate students; on the contrary, she was prey to their sometimes cruel sense of humour, which not unusually led her to weep in front of her students, creating an image of helplessness. I could sense a slightly contemptuous and condescending attitude towards weak, bullied Sue, who said herself:

- I put up with it to a certain extent, and make a joke of it... now and again, but occasionally I get very very cross and I blow up. And once I walked out on that class,

<sup>20</sup>W. Waller (1967) op cit., pp 195-6

because they were being so rude, and would not listen to anything wouldn't respond to my requests, so I just walked away... I shut my book and left them.<sup>21</sup>

Her students, a group of nineteen with only two males, commented on her 'bits and pieces' method, and appreciated how she tried to 'make it more lively', without really achieving it.

- Sometimes you enjoy it and you want to go more into it, to know more about it... or it is boring, and you tend to switch off and be apart... like when we did Hamlet... that was quick!

I think it should be done more creative... like Mrs C, she gives us a lot of hand-outs... that helps.

- ... and it could be a lot more informal...

The next excerpt is from an interview with female students S, C, and male A, high flyers in Sue's group. D's posture was towards literary 'purism', and he believed that boredom was linked to the low level of knowledge and interest of the majority of his classmates, not exactly 'up to literary standards'.

S: I find there's a lot of pressure on us to read all those classics... Mrs C... I find it a bit heavy- going, being forced to read all these books you wouldn't read if you were given a choice...

C: I feel the same as S, about the classics...

D: I'd take away about fifteen people in that class, have about three to four... with a tutor thing, it would be so much more interesting... we sit there and we read through the books or the poems together and we spend lessons to go through chapters, and... it gets really boring. Even for us who like it... I'd like to do a lot more essays than we do, I think we could be pushed harder. Because... I think teachers don't push us hard enough, which is why we get stuck two terms doing one book... *Sons and Lovers* is taking us for ever! Getting to the point where everyone is bored with it now. I think that the main thing is the time wasted in that class, because it's such a big class!... and there's a lot of repetition... in my personal point-of-view it really is irritating.

Another group of Sue's students, all female, raised similar issues, mentioning the slow pace of reading, the limited number of texts, and the consequent tediousness. They then made some comments about Sue's teaching strategies.

L: I feel worried about how much English we have done; we've done only one book, and we still have three to do... it's been so slow, so tedious!...

O: Essay-writing, for me, is unpredictable... The last one I just scribbled it all out, the first thing that came to my head... I thought it was really awful, because it was unplanned, but then she gave me sort of a B... I was surprised... If I was head of department, I'd change it all...

B: I find A level so different from GCSE...

O: Mrs C knows quite a lot of stuff... and it's not tense...

L: ... but I wouldn't say that... she's... very much in control of our class... we used to say things... just to wind her up... not on purpose, though; but... she's a real good teacher...

O: Yeah, but I think that... she's got a lot of knowledge but... the teaching... I think that to control the class is important...

<sup>21</sup> One group of Pete's students who had been with Sue the previous year described her as someone whom they did not like for being too soft; she taught barely nothing and did a lot of crying in class, whenever she could not control the discipline.

In a formal environment such as Hollybush School's, it seems difficult to believe that those students felt as free and relaxed as to 'lift their feet, take off their shoes and throw them about', the behaviour mentioned both by them and by Sue, which had caused her to leave the room in tears, unable to control the discipline. Obviously, they were testing the boundaries of their own power and Sue's limits of endurance.

At the Inner-city College, there were hardly any comments about pedagogical strategies or methods. Teaching strategies were undeniably different, with less passive methods at the college, and students left much more on their own, made to feel responsible for their own learning and specific development. The issues which were raised there belonged to the realm of social and cultural differences and relations inside and outside literature classrooms, and were not immediately visible, as were those voiced at Hollybush. In my view, the covert nature of problems made them even more worrying.

The long extract below is part of an interview with Pennie's students. In it they raise the issue of pleasure being damaged by duty in the treatment of literature, and the feeling of socio-cultural strangeness in her class. One of the students said she was born in Turkey, another in Ghana, the third in London, of African parentage.

- 1- I'm quite comfortable with it, it's more or less what I'd expected it to be... but sometimes I wonder, you know, gosh, there's so much to learn...
- 2- ...no, I don't enjoy it as I could because of the... there's a lot of pressure...
- 3- ... analysing spoils the pleasure, because you know you are doing it for a purpose, and not for enjoyment.
- 1- I think the way we're taught is good... Pennie helps us through, she doesn't spoonfeed us, she lets us... discuss...it's helpful in many ways.
- 2- ...it's helpful sometimes, but then there are people who dominate the discussion...
- 3- ... often we don't say what we think...
- 2- ... it can be frustrating, and also demotivating... makes you feel incapable...
- 1- And what makes it worse is that the teacher is not aware of it... the discussion has been switched on to another area, and some students don't fit in it and all, and the teacher is not aware...
- 3- ... and you don't really matter... they talk about all those things you've never heard about, and you feel left out, feel stupid...
- 2- ...and nobody wants your opinion, no value at all... and it doesn't really have to do a lot with the course... the way we talk, because we came from Hackney...
- 1- I come from Brixton, and it's a totally different culture change... people judge you for your accent, where you come from...
- 3- ... you are made feel different... it happens to me all the time!
- 1- It does make you feel self-conscious... in my History class as well... there I'm totally lost...
- 2- It is assumed that everyone knows the same things, knowledge is taken for granted... the whole class has to know all those extra things, and if you don't...

- 3- ... the other day, there was somebody in our class calling another person a philistine... because they didn't know a tale or something like that... You know, not all of us have the same opportunity... you know, moneywise...
- 1- ... and some of our parents can't even speak English properly!
- 2- And it's expensive to go to places! And also in our [original] schools we were taught other things, we have some knowledge that they don't...
- 3- ... they don't wanna know!
- 2- And teachers aren't sensitive to that either.
- 1- And of course they are going to relate to those kids they identify with more and talk... they'll know what is going on... rather than explain to the whole class...
- 3- And then you feel so little when you ask and you get a response of... oh, you must know that...
- 2- ... and they will joke about it... and you don't like to ask, because you know you're going to be embarrassed...
- 1- It happens more in Pennie's class...
- 3- ... and she's so passionate, that you switch to a subject that she loves, she will totally forget that... oops... there's something here people don't know...
- 1- ... and she's so fond of culture... we don't follow...
- 2- And you end up thinking what's going on, which can be quite...
- 3- ... and you see people would be like just 'my God please shut your mouth'...
- 1- ...it doesn't mean that you are less intelligent than they are...
- 2- ... I mean, it's complicated [to complain about they way we feel] because it's something we can't explain well, and... I think we just have to cope with that...
- 1- ... and it's a lot subconscious anyway... we have to make the most of what we got anyway...

There seems to be a gradation in their utterance, as they started comparing less personal issues, such as the course contents compromising the enjoyment of reading, and showing appreciation for Pennie's teaching strategies; however, as they seemed to become more confident, the socio-cultural element started to appear, and to take over the conversation. Those three female students analysed the situation in a clear and strong way, showing how the pedagogy of literature excluded them from deeper participation, either because there was a special connection in the values imbued in the teacher and the middle-class students, or because 'knowledge is taken for granted', which their awareness showed is not a problem of intelligence, but of cultures, local, social and political. These points were reinforced by other groups of Pennie's students, whereas a few concentrated on the vagueness of essay titles, on the massiveness of English literature, and how things only became clear after Pennie would go through texts with them, even though they had gone through those same texts '*over twenty times without understanding a word*'. What teachers described as students' apathy was, in fact, an externalisation of their lack of confidence in their competence to deal with texts, as

passive learners<sup>22</sup>. Students in general were not given any help in finding and evaluating resources, and were given a sort of freedom they were unable to use.

In a multicultural environment such as that of the college, there was a strong feeling against keeping Shakespeare in the syllabuses, opposed to the home-county school, where even the students with a negative self-image as low achievers believed Shakespeare should be part of the syllabus because his works represented the British heritage. A few of Pennie's students also suggested she should use more schematic approaches, and use the board more regularly, in order to allow a better thought organisation. This is another group of her students, two female and a male.

X- Pennie talks a lot, she spends half the lesson talking to you, and the thing is... usually there's half of students who actually know what she is talking about, they've read all those books, or understand that theatre thing... and the rest of the class, if they choose not to involve themselves... or don't understand, they can just sit in that class the whole double lesson without saying one word and leave the lesson without having a clue... You'll just have to go and write an essay...

Y- I feel really dumb in that class and don't get involved in anything taught, I can sit there and I might as well not be there, because... I'm not getting anything out of being there... not actually getting any help, I'm not getting any closer, just sitting there watching...

X- She's not good at individual help really. She treats us like adults and things like that, and she does describe things well, but... she doesn't like to write things down on the board, and say... this is what you've got to do and... split up... and structure... and cause, she says... here's the title, and she talks about all of the poems and stuff... and we think well, that's fine, we go home and we don't do it for a week, and you say, I can't...

Y- ... at the end of the lesson you've got nothing to go home and reflect back on, cause... it's all right during the lesson, you get high on... but then when you finally sit down at home a week later to write the essay you've got nothing...

Z- (male student) It's true, because... half of the time Pennie is talking to a level we don't understand and... just sit there, she won't get down...

Y- ... you may spend the whole lesson discussing what the essay is about, or what the book is like, but at the end of the day, you still might not have a clue of what is required of you, what you have to write about...

Z- Here's there is one thing; we don't know them [teachers], and they don't know us... here, it is a lot of hard work and a lot of growing up... a lot more intense, and demanding... as opposed to a school...

It was possible to find that, among the five teachers more closely observed, the one for whom students showed unlimited admiration was Mark, who apparently was the least self-confident among the professionals interviewed. They would not make any changes in his teaching style and strategies, if they were to teach literature, and used other teachers' approaches as basis for comparison. This

<sup>22</sup> As narrated by Boerckel and Barnes (1991) op cit., p. 3, taking away the 'typical, comfortable structure in which [students] were defined as passive learners' puts them totally at a loss. In the English paradigm seen, without access to other forms of reading, students lack a consistent theoretical framework on which to base their required 'opinion'.

group had K and M (female) and D, who did the talking, supported by K and M's approving signs.

If I were to teach it, I would just do it the way Mark does: he is not strict, nor afraid, doesn't make students tense, is very relaxed, but at the same time, he teaches them a lot. He takes and respects your ideas—differently from the other teacher we have, who gets angry a lot, is rather impatient, too serious, he will ask you something, you try to answer and it is never right, never enough, he keeps saying: 'no, go on...', or 'yes, but...go on, go on...'; whereas Mark will say: 'yes, it is all right, but you can change in this way or that way ..'; the other one expects students to guess one exact word, the word he has in mind and only that one.

Other students in Mark's group felt the course to be more disciplined than they had expected, and say '*he's funny, it's a relaxed atmosphere and... it's something you want to do, no one is afraid to talk*'. Still, two students in Mark's group suggested more varied approaches, with a bit more of role-playing, and said that they would change the syllabus if they could, definitely banning Shakespeare from A-level exams.

Still at the college, Rose's students did not seem to feel the strong class division Pennie's students complained about. They praised her highly for her knowledge of literary matters, '*otherwise she wouldn't be head of department*'. They said she pushed them hard enough, was strictly professional, avoiding to make personal links, but doing her job as well as she was able to. However, a different group (who said they were American, Jamaican and African-English) felt slightly out of place, because of the syllabus, which was limited to English authors. They mocked Shakespeare and Donne, and praised Maya Angelou's and Toni Morrison's books. Also, they resented Rose's strictly professorial approach, which put them off and sometimes made them insecure.

- People in the government or at the Education Board don't realise that there's so many people from different parts of the world here in England and they wanna know about where they come from as well... I mean, so that they can relate to as well...
- As for me, I'm a great fan of horror stories, and there's nothing like that in the syllabus...
- Also, I'd rather have kids discover things for themselves, rather than tell them: this is this, and that is that, you know? Maybe I could put more experience into it...
- ...and as we're not children, they should be able to relate to students as well, to share a laugh with them as well, instead of being serious and a teacher only...
- Some won't say 'that's wrong', but might say 'oh, you have an interesting point to make, lets' talk', whatever... Sometimes they can really intimidate you there... with all their degrees and time of teaching, so it just puts me off and... I leave it!
- ... some teachers can get pissed off when you ask... I think I like Rachel better, Rose is very much sitting down and doing your work by yourself... Rose talks to you and everyone can hear what she says, and sometimes she says your essay is crap, and everybody else knows..
- ... it's not good for my feelings... If you're not friendly, it doesn't work in the classroom. You hate the teacher, you don't do the work.



- Yeah, the relationship with the teacher can get a bit... tense, you are afraid to ask things... It won't work, because... you're there only to answer, not to ask, anyway...
- ... to answer the things they want to hear, which... affects your learning.
- My message to teachers of literature would be... put a little more enthusiasm in your teaching, and try to be more of a friend than just a teacher...
- ... and I'd say, give some privacy to your students, when make criticisms and all that...
- ... and take *King Lear* away...
- ... together with the long essay...

One of the lessons viewed with Rose was based on a comparison between *Jane Eyre* and *Beloved*. Her approach did not in fact invite criticism, or different ways of looking into the texts, and students were not allowed 'a chance to gain more control over their lives' by becoming critically aware.<sup>23</sup>

What can be inferred from the above description is the difficulty of dealing with unpredictable, ever-changing classroom situations, by adopting a set of ready-made rules and fixed profiles for students, clearly seen as 'opponents' in the pedagogical process. Tony Davies believes that there is a debate going on, centred on what *to read English* means, in which students participate as objects throughout. As such, their views of teachers depend basically on whether they classify them as literarily or pedagogically competent.

### Gaps and Contradictions, Difficulties and Limits

Bogdan writes that 'teaching to or for theoretical understanding does not erase the question of the powerful impetus for personal change inherent in all teaching', and she quotes Felman: any 'reading lesson is... not a statement; it is a performance. It is not theory, it is practice... for (self) transformation'<sup>24</sup>.

Griffith asks whether all teachers are political animals, and whether all people in organisations are politically aware and involved, and he himself answers that no, they are not. The school teachers declared themselves politically apathetic, as if it was possible to remain outside politics in the field of education. At the college, politics was an issue of discussion, although students' statements confronted teachers' declared left-wing political posture, as the majority of non-Anglo, working-class students felt unseen and underrepresented in most teachers' literary discourse and classroom practices. Harber (1992, p 13) suggests that

<sup>23</sup> Boerckel et al (1991) op cit., describing work done in class using Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*: 'As long as we treat our students democratically, they have a chance to gain more control over their lives by being forced, but gently, to become critically aware' (p 9).

<sup>24</sup> Deanne Bogdan, 'When is a Singing...?' op cit., p.12. She quotes from S. Felman (1987) *Jacques Lacan and the Adventure of Insight*, p.20

young people have been socialised towards conservative and inegalitarian values. By trying to keep a safe distance from openly political issues, Sue and Pete, for instance, believed that they refrain from political identification and choices, sometimes with their own assenting silence acting by omission. As *useful innocents*, they help maintain traditional structures and interests. Harber adds that if the younger generation were led to 'reflect critically on the political framework of life in this country, this should involve a consideration of how particular structures and procedures have evolved and their appropriateness to today's multiracial population'<sup>25</sup>.

When discussing the use of theory, some authors suggest that literature at school should be studied together with social studies, so that historic documents and source books could play a considerable part in English lessons, and treated as though they were literary works themselves, in respect of the effects they were designed to produce upon others; a convergence, and not a merger, for *fiction after all remains deviant discourse*<sup>26</sup>. The distance found in practice between literary theories and classroom approaches seems to reinforce the power of implicit class values in the teaching and studying of literature in England, even at the college.

If literature is intimately related to questions of social power, its effect on controlling and educating adolescents at school cannot be ignored. In spite of the apparent *scrutiny* literary texts go through in Sue's and Pete's classes, their approach cannot be said to *stress the centrality of rigorous critical analysis, a disciplined attention to the "words on the page" encapsulating creative energies against modern commercial society*<sup>27</sup>. In common with the Scrutiny project<sup>28</sup>, Hollybush teachers hold the elitist socio-cultural belief that *literature makes you a*

<sup>25</sup> Harber (1992) op cit., p 13. The author quotes from the Swann Report, D.E.S., 1985: paragraph 3.9. 'By mid-80s', he explains, 'when the right-wing backlash was at its height, the authoritative Swann Report on multicultural education gave it unequivocal support as being necessary to combat racism and develop a pluralist democracy'.

<sup>26</sup> P Griffith (1987) op cit., pp 60-70. The strategy proposed by Griffith is to identify the gaps, silences and contradictions within the (literary) text, the ones found in social history, and finally to see what contradictions arise when the two structures are juxtaposed. This is the convergent analysis he proposes, and for which he finds support in Foucault and Barthes.

<sup>27</sup> Eagleton (1989) op cit., pp 31-32

<sup>28</sup> Scrutiny was the critical journal launched in 1932 by F.R. Leavis and Q D. Leavis, devoted to 'the moral centrality of English studies, their crucial relevance to the quality of social life as a whole'. Its importance was such that English students in England today are its heirs, knowingly or not. As stated by Eagleton (1989) op cit., p 31

*better person*, and that some kinds of English are more worthy than others, which Eagleton considers 'a petty-bourgeois version of upper-class chauvinism modulated by a new social class' (1989, p. 37).

Different authors have argued that significances are historically variable, whereas meanings remain constant: 'authors put in meanings, whereas readers assign significances'<sup>29</sup>. The most commonly observed prompting question - 'what does the author mean here' - uncovers the true role of classroom students, which is not that of participants, active readers or historically active subjects. The problem of authorial intention has been dealt with in different forms, at different socio-historical times, in the search for various meanings of a literary text. It has not been possible to determine with strict confidence what textual meanings are, although students are made to believe in literary truths and exclusive readings, without contemplating opposing or differing lines of thought other than that presented to them by their teacher, and the teachers' cribs.

In this study I defend the point that, without access to different theoretical lines of thought or understanding of intrinsic textual genres, students cannot act as critics empowered to reconstruct the general conventions and views surrounding the author at the time of writing; nor are they trained to interpret a past work through 'a dialogue between past and present'<sup>30</sup>. Consequently, they cannot be expected to break away from the readings of social reality imposed upon them, as aimed at by the examining system. It is certain, though, that the classroom strategies observed were strongly affected, perhaps even dictated by the examining rules, supposedly requiring 'critical personal response' instead of any other reaction to the impact of written texts. As frankly stated by Sue:

Yes, you have to teach to the exam, I mean... You've got to... they have to learn to deliver what the examiners want. If you can widen their horizons in a general way at the same time, then that's good. Basically the aim of the exercise is to get them as good a grade as possible.

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<sup>29</sup>Eagleton (1989) op cit., p 67 - the author is discussing the hermeneuticist E.D. Hirsch Jr's position about the possibility of a number of different valid interpretations of a work, although they must move within the 'system of typical expectations and probabilities' allowed by the author's meaning (to which we do not always have access); thus, a literary work can 'signify' different things to different people at different times.

<sup>30</sup>Eagleton (1989) op cit., p 71, on Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*: 'the meaning of a literary work is never exhausted by the intentions of its author; as the work passes from one cultural or historical context to another, new meanings may be culled from it which were perhaps never anticipated by its author or contemporary audience'.

In order for students to do well, Sue and Pete were seen performing a textual translation and interpretation ritual which required from readers/ students a two-year long physical disposition to copy and annotate. On recognising the importance of historical connections as additional information, Pete limited history to unproblematic factual knowledge which did not call for political argumentation.

Regardless of academic theorisation, school practice is based upon 'close reading', interpretation and analysis, in a one-way route and routine which links students' academic success to implicit assumptions of what they have to do. In this sense, to allow students to talk and present their own textual readings, impressions, difficulties and inferences would mean a 'waste of everyone's time', whereas annotating teachers' explication is taking a short-cut which allows more reading and interpretation time. Such measurement of successful teaching expresses qualitative matters and becomes the classroom theory dominant in A-level courses, authenticated by a high number of passes in the exams.

## **PART TWO: INTERPRETING EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

Part I has offered the reader an account of personal, academic and professional habitus and cultural contexts. It has aimed to facilitate the understanding of the sources of inspiration for this dissertation, having described classrooms rites in Brazil and in England in Part One. In the second part of this dissertation I aim to reflect upon the data produced in some classrooms in the State of Rio de Janeiro, in London and at an English home-county, inviting the reader to share the socio-cultural foreignness of those situations, while analysing the empirical evidence collected through observation, and through teachers' and students' voices.

In Part II I begin to develop through description and analysis the idea of literature education as social metaphor. I examine how the concepts of 'difficulty', 'good reader', 'silence', among others in literature classrooms, are powerful metaphors of societies.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Methodological Approach

A steep slope of language  
 zigzags from me to you.  
 You will break your neck on it.  
 You know exactly  
     what you have said.  
 You do not  
     know what I have heard.<sup>1</sup>

I tried to rid myself of my own assumptions, prejudices and judgement on entering other teaching-learning situations, by using a 'foreign view' of both contexts, Brazilian and English classrooms. As such, I felt it would be necessary to base my view of classroom representations of literature education on evidence which was relatively sturdy, using methods that are intended to help me achieve a representative level. The major foci of interest were issues of power, cultural identities and definitions, and socio-political relationships, looking into other questions such as gender and class politics. For that reason, literature education as understood in this work became, rather than a matter of language, or art, a possibility of analysis of some cultural representations of society.

### Looking into research approaches

Amongst the possible approaches for social research, some authors describe ethnography as its foundational form, attempting to display the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life. It has been defined as 'direct observation of members of a particular social group, and the description and evaluation of such activity'.<sup>2</sup> According to Agar, the ethnographer's role is

to show how social action in one world makes sense from the point of view of another. Such work requires an intensive personal involvement, an abandonment of traditional scientific control, an improvisational style to meet situations not of the researcher's making, and an ability to learn from a long series of mistakes.<sup>3</sup>

Ethnographic data have been criticised for placing a high value on subjective materials. Nevertheless, many authors argue that only through ethnography can social processes be accurately understood.<sup>4</sup> Some authors

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Kaufman, 'After the Voices', *Gold Country*

<sup>2</sup> N. Abercrombie et al (1988) *Dictionary of Sociology*, 2nd edition, London: Penguin.

<sup>3</sup> Michael H. Agar (1986) *Speaking of Ethnography*, p 12

<sup>4</sup> J. Spradley (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*, Holt, Rinehart Winston; the author views ethnography as characteristically adequate for the elicitation of cultural knowledge.

consider ethnography to be synonymous with participant observation, as a social research method drawing on a wide range of sources of information, requiring that the ethnographer participates in the daily activities of a classroom, for example, for a period of time, watching, listening, and asking questions, whichever is available to clarify the issues he/she is looking into. What is crucial in this type of data-collecting method is the reflexive character of social research, as explained by Hammersley and Atkinson.<sup>5</sup>

Before deciding for a method, I had also considered narrative analysis, in the sense used by Bruner of 'how protagonists interpret things'<sup>6</sup>, an approach which gives prominence to human agency and imagination, and is suited to studies of subjectivity and identity. Sociological investigators believe that by studying narratives they can understand social life, as 'culture "speaks itself" through an individual's story' (Riessman, p.5), allowing gender, race, and class issues to be examined. However, the possibility of using narrative analysis was limited by the fact that part of my data had to be translated from Portuguese, involving my active interference as language mediator. Riessman states that forms of transcript, by neglecting some features, miss important information, and adds that

However compelling narrative may be as a metaphor for telling about lives, systematic methods of analysis and detailed transcription are often lacking. [...] Most scholars treat narratives as discrete units, with clear beginnings and endings, as detachable from the surrounding discourse rather than as situated events. (Riessman, p 17)

Neither was I comfortable to use a purely semiotical approach for similar reasons. For Manning, semiotics studies whole ordered by rules, that is, it studies 'the whole, or society, by the study of language or discourse'<sup>7</sup>.

The human being is not the primary object in itself, a source of motivations, actions, or the basis from which one infers prior principles; the human being is constituted from and by discourse. In this sense, discourse and rules that govern it are seen as governing the possible forms, roles, and actions that one might imagine or impute to a "person".

In this study I have used a variety of elements for the collection and interpretation of my data. Manning's semiotic view is that 'social life is a field of signs organized by other signs about signs that communicate various social relations' (p 33). In this sense, I believe to have used an informal semiotic approach as a mode of problem identification. I have also used narratives and their

<sup>5</sup> M. Hammersley & P. Atkinson (1983) *Ethnography: Principles and Practices*, Tavistock

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from Catherine K. Riessman (1993) *Narrative Analysis*, p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Peter K. Manning (1987) *Semiotics and Fieldwork*, pp 30-1

socio-political meanings, without looking at them as the scientific ideal. Rather, they helped me to pay attention to the 'contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them' (Riessman, p 22) . In fact, I have pursued the knowledge found in the thinking and acting of teachers and students of literature in ordinary classroom situations.

I do not consider my research as following the 'strong view' of ethnographic methodologies. For instance, in most of the situations where I collected my data, I performed the role of (non-participant) observer, sometimes included in the activities, but more often than not just acting as an external onlooker. I agree with Cartwright that absolute objectivity is impossible in any information-gathering procedure and that observation methods in general involve more subjective judgement than some other evaluation procedures. However, this does not mean that observation should be deleted as a data-gathering method because it has associated problems, provided that its limitations are considered and attention given to reducing possible errors.<sup>8</sup> Thus, to circumvent excessive subjectivity during observation, I found it important to provide supporting information, such as tape recordings and samples of written work, annotation of visual information (through describing the setting, number, gender and ethnic grouping of students), and of summarised information about lesson structures, strategies and teacher-student interaction. I did not use structural methods such as those described by Nuthall, Gallagher and Rosenshine<sup>9</sup>. However, the studies reported by Nuthall relating Carl Rogers' concept of 'openness' in human transactions to classroom interaction created an awareness in my observation of teachers' comments on student responses.<sup>10</sup>

Observation has been described as a period of unease, if limited to only sitting and watching, as the observer looks into the action as 'a non-reactive presence taken the role of audience rather than performer'<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, these moments of distanced contemplation, in spite of being necessarily fragmented, brief

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<sup>8</sup> Cartwright, Carol A. (1984) *Developing observation skills*, pp 49, 118

<sup>9</sup> *Classroom Observation* (1970): monographs by James J Gallagher, Graham A Nuthall, and Barak Rosenshine. Rand McNally Education Series.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Nuthall 'A Review of Some Selected Recent Studies of Classroom Interaction and Teaching Behaviour' in *Classroom Observation* (1970), op cit., p.9

<sup>11</sup> Walker, Rob & Adelman, Clem (1975). *A Guide to Classroom Observation*. London: Methuen, pp 10-20



and easily disturbed, allow the observer both a better view of things which teachers many times cannot see, and a better view of him/herself; observation includes reviewing ourselves, our own feelings and responses to events, whereas demanding also 'a certain naiveté, an ability to create the unexpected and unusual out of the commonplace and mundane'.<sup>12</sup>

Another issue of concern from the early stages was whether my problem was 'researchable', by which I mean, the possibility of having a clear analysis leading to some answers, obtainable by empirical means (observation and interviews) and mainly, by critical reflection. As the data produced through fieldwork would be analysed qualitatively, I expected to be allowed unlimited kinds of information, primary or secondary, using an exploratory (and not rigidly structured) approach which presupposes, among other things, the researcher positioned as an insider, in close relationship with the subject and the subjects researched, attempting to keep an emergent relationship between theoretical concepts and the piece of research. But at no time has method been prioritised over the problem to be researched.

I have consciously opted for a less constrained discourse, using the subjects' voices to describe practices and to deal with the dilemmas and contradictions encountered in the interpretation of data. It seems to me that avoiding a rigid structure of analysis confirms my option for a non-patriarchal academic narrative, seeking a subjective representation of the theme of research.

### **The use of fieldwork**

Manning (p 9) describes fieldwork as the

systematic gathering of data on specific aspects of social life by means other than social surveys, demographic techniques, and experimentation that includes an ongoing relationship with those studied. [... It is] based upon pragmatism and symbolic interactionism and is associated with the emergence of sociology as a search for and understanding of societies and social worlds and the life histories contained therein.

First of all, I posed myself a set of questions, which helped to decide on the details concerning approaches and strategies of data collecting, such as:

what information do I want? why do I want it? when do I need it? how do I collect it? where can I find it and from whom? what am I going to do with it? is it reliable and valid for my purposes?

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<sup>12</sup> Walker & Adelman (1975), op cit., pp 21-33

It supported my focus on classroom information, as the research required evidence of data directly related to the actors involved in the process of literature education. Although the focus has been on the observed present, the findings have been contextualised within a social, cultural and historical framework. Fieldwork was carried out after I had acquired theoretical acquaintance not only with the English system, but also with related questions posed by teachers and academics writing about literature education, in order to achieve the necessary knowledge about the field and be able to better evaluate conflicts, dilemmas and even reflect upon my own interpretation bias. I perceived that accuracy was to be achieved by a 'triangulation' of data, to be done by the combination of: observation, teachers' interviews and students' interviews.

On entering other classrooms than my own I had a set of in-built concepts which very much guided my focus of interest towards interpreting visible signs. Thus, it seemed necessary to concentrate on social relationships, and the (visible) profile of teachers and taught; for example, I always noted down the number of students, the disposition of chairs or desks in relation to teacher's positioning, the gender ratio, and what seemed to me visually determined ethnicities, besides the sorts of pedagogical interaction, activities proposed and the level of response forwarded by students.

I have understood that there are, in every social group, hidden signs which are not visible to the outsider: any specific subject is always situated within a culture which is made up of conflicting and contradictory discourses because of the 'multiaccentuality of the sign', and consequently it becomes part of research to emphasise 'the unstable, provisional, and dynamic properties of subject positions', while looking for the coherence in the essence of contradictory discourses.<sup>13</sup>

My *habitus* inevitably played a crucial role in the construction of the interviewing process. I write as a Brazilian academic with a twenty-yearlong experience of classroom teaching. Nevertheless, it was only possible to achieve a realistic view of English schooling and the educational system through classroom observation, trying to understand that culture, that society, its teaching-learning

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Jancovich, 'David Morley, *The Nationwide Studies*', in Barker & Beezer (eds.) (1992) *Reading into Cultural Studies*, p 141

actors and their dilemmas, interests and questions. I was not aiming at a comparative study of literatures, cultures or pedagogies; in fact, on attempting to move 'beyond insularity and provincialism', I tried to get 'a perspective beyond one's own nation, to see some sort of whole instead of the defensive little patch offered by one's own culture, literature, and history'.<sup>14</sup>

Through interviewing I attempted to review particularly the perceptions teachers and students have of their actions. Whereas teachers' interviews were done individually, at a time and place set by them, students were interviewed in groups of three (I was attempting to avoid a situation of having, for instance, two students in polarising attitude, or one embarrassed student talking to me), during lesson time suggested and allowed by teachers. Both types of interviews had three groupings of questions. Thus, while the initial batch of questions aimed at 'methodological objectivism'<sup>15</sup>, to confirm or deny my own conclusions as an observer, the overtly pedagogical and socio-political sets of questions were planned motivated by my own interest in and necessity of finding answers to some basic questions aiming at the formulation of a pedagogic-political project:

*what are the purposes of teaching and studying literature?*

*what is the present social role of literature education in schools?*

*how can we empower social subjects in literature classrooms?*

Theorists of ethnographic research draw attention to the powerful role exercised by the interviewer. That power can hardly be ignored, as it becomes a forceful element in the conduct of the action, through approving or disapproving hints, interruptions, insistence, agreement, silence, or requests for clarification, even though in my interviews it happened amidst what Bourdieu calls a *discourse of familiarity* (interviewer and interviewees inhabiting similar professional realms), which required things to be brought to a state of explicitness as overtly as possible<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Edward W. Said (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, Chapter One, p. 49

<sup>15</sup> According to Bourdieu, 'a necessary moment in all research, by the break with primary experience and the construction of objective relations which it accomplishes [demanding] its own supersession' (1995 op cit., p 72).

<sup>16</sup> Bourdieu (95) writes that 'the informant's discourse owes its best-hidden properties to the fact that it is the product of a *semi-theoretical* disposition, inevitably induced by any learned questioning'. He adds that the 'relationship between informant and anthropologist is somewhat analogous to a pedagogical relationship, in which the master must bring to the state of explicitness, for the purposes of transmission, the unconscious schemes of his practice' (op cit., p

As an interviewer, as well as an academic writer, I had certain kinds of power before teachers, which meant that I had to deal with their overt or hidden resistance. I also had to struggle between providing the subjects of research with access to my analysis or not. Had I opted to submit my findings to their scrutiny, I would be allowing a forceful interference in my writing; thus, I decided to simply discuss issues orally and as overtly as possible immediately after each interview, but to keep my interpretation and conclusions to the thesis text. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and names of teachers and schools have been changed, although it would be disingenuous to deny that 'insiders' may find it possible to identify sources.

A double checking of records has been done, and the *externalisation of internality*<sup>17</sup> shows that, at that time and in that context, those teachers and students of literature expressed those views of socio-political, cultural, literary and pedagogical matters to me.

### Data collecting

I interviewed a total number of fourteen teachers in varied socio-cultural settings, chosen for the reasons of geographical feasibility (home-county school and Springhill), performance reputation (Inner-city college and Springhill) and political representation in State education (Inner-city college, Homer School and Figtree). I feel relatively confident that those teachers - as instances of professional formation, of views and practices - have a certain typicality representative of literature schooling.

One of the difficulties I encountered during the data-collection stage in English schools was the level of formality between teachers and students, which seemed to create a social gap between their culture and mine. At the 'Interviews as a method for data collection' seminar at the Institute of Education in 1994, I raised this issue and the group discussed the ethical implications of, for instance, asking students to address me on first-name terms, contrary to the habitual formal treatment dispensed by their teachers (except at the college). We concluded that, being an alien, it might be interpreted as a cultural idiosyncrasy rather than a

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18). I am using here Bourdieu's analyses of anthropological relationships and substituting the interviewing situation.

<sup>17</sup>Bourdieu (95), op cit., p 72

challenge to the dominant attitude pattern. Anyhow, it is not differences as such which should be the main concentration of audience research, but instead, *the meaning of differences*, something that can only be grasped, interpretatively, by looking at their contexts, social and cultural bases, and impacts<sup>18</sup>.

In Brazil, thirty-four lessons were observed, and I tried to interview all the teachers viewed; however, while some teachers were eager to be seen in action, and shied away from being interviewed, the opposite also occurred. Consistent evidence, as planned, was achieved through the combination of observation and interview methods with teachers Lena, Ney and Louise from Figtree School, teachers Beth and Martha from Homer School, and Lucy and Anne from Springhill. Interviewing students proved to be a complicated affair, and I was only successful with three groups at Homer, and two groups at Figtree. The difficulties were many and varied: the structural division of the day's work into three shifts, the reduced number of literature lessons per week, the short mid-shift break, with no interval between lessons, all were elements which prevented a closer contact with Brazilian students - as an outsider.

The questions to be asked by myself during observation, and interviewees at the next stage of data production, were planned according to my attempt to determine each teacher's *habitus*<sup>19</sup> first, looking at the definition of social, economic and cultural origin backgrounds, in connection with the development of reading habits and choice of profession. Secondly, the interviews should provide a profile of literature teachers' pedagogical agendas, regarding content organisation (through lesson planning, for instance) and classroom attitudes; thirdly, implicit

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Jancovich, 'David Morley, *The Nationwide Studies*', in Barker & Beezer (1992) op cit., p 142. Jancovich is quoting from Ien Ang, 'Wanted: Audiences. On the Politics of Empirical Audience Studies', in Ellen Seiter et al. (ed.) *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*, London: Routledge 1990, p 107.

<sup>19</sup> 'Systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.' Pierre Bourdieu (1995) 'Structures and the habitus' in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p 72 As for *disposition*, Bourdieu defines it as 'what is covered by the concept of habitus (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as structure; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*.(p 214)

ideological values related to gender issues and socio-political options were expected to appear implicitly throughout the whole text and explicitly in the final batch of questions.

Although the same sets of opening questions were used, sometimes diverging interests unexpectedly changed the direction of the interviews, frequently adding invaluable elements to the conversation. I also tried to satisfy the interviewees' curiosity about my work, research, cultural background, motives and interests by offering to answer their questions at the end of each talk, in both countries. In Brazil, Springhill's three teachers were interviewed individually at the staff room, on different dates, after having observed year two and three lessons with two of them. At Figtree, I interviewed Louise before the co-ordination meeting, before seeing her twice teaching a group of year-three students; Ney and Lena were interviewed together, after observation, during mid-morning interval at the staff room. At Homer School, I interviewed five teachers, although not the same observed, due to the tight teaching schedule, and also to the fact that teachers usually hold at least two different jobs, with little manoeuvring time or space.

In England, six schools were visited, and more intensive observation was done in one of the home-county schools, and at the Inner-city college; a total number of fifty-two lessons were observed. The two home-county school teachers, Sue and Pete, were interviewed separately at the English-department room, after extensive observation, as well as the three Inner-city college teachers, Mark, Rose and Pennie. There were hardly any interruptions during the conversations, all tape recorded.

### **To interview teachers**

All the interviews were initially prompted by the same set of questions but, without a rigid structure to follow, it was possible to engage in more dynamic conversation, and allow more detailed information about the issues specially relevant to interviewees. For instance, if a topic emerged during the conversation, I permitted it to become part of the interviewing process, even though it might have been a later point on my agenda, to avoid to interrupt the interviewees' flow of thought.

The questions asked teachers in both countries were:

- . Is there any connection between your upbringing and your work as a literature teacher?
- . Do you consider yourself more of a scholar or a teacher?
- . How do you plan your lessons?
- . What do you think are your main professional difficulties?
- . Do you relate current issues to your literature teaching practice? (Or, can you recall any public issue you've had a chance to discuss with your students lately?)
- . Are you a political 'animal'?

I was provided with information about teachers' socio-economic background, families and schooling; about their personal processes of introduction to literary reading; about their academic routes and their professional formation as literature teachers. By asking about their working routine, I aimed to detect their pedagogical and theoretical concerns in the elaboration of lesson plans. Although not all questions were as overtly political as the last one, my objective throughout the interviews was to build up a profile of literature teachers in terms of their political awareness and commitment in and out of their classrooms.

The answers I obtained indicated, with some variation, that basically

- . the linking element in literature teachers' upbringing was their proximity to literary reading in childhood, either at home or at the local library, rarely at school; there was indication of a strong social-class bias;
- . teachers in general denied scholarly knowledge and refused the role of intellectuals;
- . there was no pattern in their planning of activities, but in general it involved little depth of research;
- . their main common difficulties were located around their dissatisfaction with students' knowledge, reading habits, class values, or literary attitudes; in Brazil there was the aggravating problem of very low salaries;
- . most teachers preferred to keep a distanced posture from political issues in their teaching practice;
- . the majority did not associate literature with political matters, believing in the possibility of literature education occurring on a 'technical level' only.

### **To interview students**

Students were interviewed more systematically in the English schools viewed, specially at the home county, where teachers Sue and Pete allowed time from their lessons for groups of three students to leave and talk to me. At the college, all of the students viewed in class were equally interviewed in a separate room. Brazilian students were not interviewed in the same way, as already

explained, because of both the strict time limits on all sides, and the fast-paced tight structure of the day, with shift divisions.

The prompting questions for students were different in each country due to the differences found in the two systems. For instance, Brazilian students are not given a choice over the subjects for examinations. Apart from that, questions covered their response to literature as a subject, to the methods used in their classrooms, their preferences for subjects of studies, how they would teach literature if they could exchange places with their teachers, and their participation in political agendas, specially with reference to literature.

English students of literature were asked:

- . what subjects are you doing, and why did you choose to study literature?
- . what are your plans for the future?
- . did you expect A-level literature to be the way it is?
- . if you were to teach literature, how would you do it?
- . what has literature done for you?
- . do you belong to any social group or society?

I was hoping to get information about students' social, cultural and political backgrounds, although the first question was planned with a view to establish relations of cause in the choice of disciplines of study. Questions three and four should provoke students into a critical evaluation of contents, methods and aims in the literature education they were getting at each school. And questions five and six would possibly lead to a reflection upon the hoped-for political awareness and social transformation reached through the study of literature, possibly raising items related to the students' participation in social movements, of whatever kind.

The answers obtained from English students showed that:

- . most students were taking other subjects in the Humanities area, and had chosen literature either because of good results previously achieved at the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, or because they had expected literature to be 'less difficult and more fun';
- . all the students intended to enter university, but not to study English;
- . they declared themselves thoroughly disappointed, due to the sterility of passive methods, to the lack of basic informative knowledge, with 'a lot of pressure', and 'too much to learn';
- . as teachers, they would adopt a 50% coursework syllabus, would use more active methods, replace some of the set texts 'with more interesting stuff', in order to make the course in general 'more lively and less boring';
- . literature education had generally interfered negatively with their attitude towards reading: 'analysing spoils the pleasure'. Some students mentioned the



- acquisition of values, of vocabulary, while for others 'knowledge is taken for granted';
- . the last question proved irrelevant, as the young interviewed did not seem to usually gather around social or political interests.

Before starting data collecting through interviews, I had a mini-piloting experience with a Brazilian student (see appendices), after which I decided to pose the following questions to literature students in Brazil:

- . what are your favourite subjects, and why?
- . what are your plans for the future?
- . did you expect *vestibular* literature to be the way it is?
- . if you were to teach literature, how would you do it?
- . what has literature done for you?
- . what do you do in your spare time?

In general, the Brazilian students interviewed answered that:

- . literature was not among their favourite subjects, due to the memorisable contents and to the unproblematized methods;
- . the vast majority planned to get a degree, although they acknowledged that their chances to pass to 'the good, free universities' were slim;
- . they had not expected literature education to be a 'combination of history and language'; however, the majority did not resent the historical contents, but the time limitation, the large amount of memorising material, the set texts and the passive methodology;
- . their proposal for literature teaching would imply a curricular change, in order to deal with more recent literary production; they would also favour interactive strategies in their classrooms; Freirean methodologies were mentioned;
- . studying literature was 'driving them away from reading';
- . spare time activities involved different degrees of socialisation, but had little to do with political issues, for the majority.

### **Data analysis and structure**

Tape transcription was done trying to reproduce the oral language uttered as standard written patterns, without reference to extra-linguistic devices other than reticence (three dots), pauses and, when applicable, indications of laughter. Thus, a pause of a few seconds, indicating an uninterrupted flow of thought, was represented by a comma; a longer pause, indicating that the interviewee would rest but continue with the same topic was represented by semi-colon, whereas a longer pause, indicating the end of an utterance, was represented by a full stop. As I aimed at the highest possible level of accuracy in the transcription of their utterances, tapes were kept at hand for further clarification whenever necessary.

The categories used to describe classroom procedures attempted to elicit habitus, teaching strategies, students' responses, interrelated with the literary topic. Both at sixth form (in England) and at secondary school (in Brazil), the chosen level for this study, classes were very much subject-matter oriented, and I found it interesting to note down the relevance attributed to extra-curricular topics, and how it related to the mechanisms of control used by the teachers observed, as well as to the mechanisms of 'resistance' used by students, either when implying a momentary or strategic opposition or 'the exertion of cultural power as a continuing feature of everyday life'<sup>20</sup>.

Given the multifarious character of literature education as a discipline of research, I had to choose from the array of possibilities for analysing research materials which approach best suited my focus; as such, cultural and political studies provided, more than an emphasis on notions of textual power, an appreciation of the interpretative strategies of readers and audiences, replacing concern for the power relations between texts and audiences, with concern for the power relations inside the research process itself<sup>21</sup>.

I tried to generate themes and categories for analysis of the data produced, as I was conducting my analysis, reviewing them frequently. Truly, to determine categories for analysis of empirical data proved to be the most crucial and difficult part of the work, requiring a close reading influenced by different theoretical sources.<sup>22</sup> I found some consolation in the fact that Barnes & Barnes also acknowledge the difficulty of dealing with the data produced in their survey of literature classrooms.<sup>23</sup> Agreeing with Volosinov that ideology may not be divorced from the material reality of the sign; that signs may not be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse; and that communication and the forms of communication may not be divorced from the material basis<sup>24</sup>, I have used multiple approaches to look at the fabric of the interviews, which presented similarities with

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<sup>20</sup> M. Barker & A. Beezer (1992), op cit., p 8

<sup>21</sup> Barker & Beezer (1992) op cit., p 9-10 develop this point further.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Hodge & Gunther Kress (1991) *Social Semiotics*, p 8 - signs and texts. Also Henry Giroux (1994) *Disturbing Pleasures*; Paulo Freire (1976) *Education: the Practice of Freedom*; plus various works by Louise Rosenblatt, Janet Batsleer, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, among others.

<sup>23</sup> Barnes & Barnes, D. (1984) *Versions of English*, p 261. 'Where to start examining the data is our first difficulty. Do we start with what the teachers said to us..., do we start with the aims of the examination course... immersing ourselves in a lesson, sharing the student experience?'

<sup>24</sup> Hodge & Kress (1991) op cit., p 18

the critical and creative reading of literary texts recommended as foundation for the construction of active social subjects, weaving research methods and critical processes of analysis together.

By looking for a socio-cultural definition of the interviewees, the agendas founding their acquisition and expansion of a literary habitus, and the pedagogical theories emerging from such habitus in its political realisation, I used the pre-planned questions as a starting point, after which other issues were raised and focused upon. Data were analysed, then, through the definition of socio-economic, cultural and literary habitus; through the interviewees' views of literature contents and practices and their perceived hierarchy of socio-cultural values in relation to literature; through the presented theory of the human subject (seen through literature studies); and through subjects' academic and social self-image.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Interpreting the Signs in Brazilian practices

Through interviewing teachers and students I wished to listen to their own voices narrating how they deal with literature and the literature-related politico-ideological issues, as well as the changes they attempted to propose under those powerful public structures. Back to my temporary home in London, re-playing the interview tapes, I listened to what Beth, a young widow with two daughters, had said about her commitment to students, about the poetry of everyday life in front of a class of secondary students dealing with written texts, about how she has experienced insomnia, despite her twenty-two years' classroom experience, the night before the first day of each school year, fearing she might fail to do the right thing, politically and academically, with each of her new classes. A handful of literature teachers like Beth have kept schools open, with their dissenting voices, which I hope I have been able to hear.

### *General Current Signs*

In Section B of Chapter Two I described the situation found in 'Guavatown' at the beginning of the school year. In March 95, there were problems in the macro-structure of the system, as the State's withdrawal from education management seemed to have reached its peak, with lower-than-ever salaries for teachers, an acute shortage of teaching staff, allied to the chronic yet increasing poverty in schools leading to a picture of abandonment of a generation of young future citizens who, at school age, had little incentive to study. The problems I propose to examine in this chapter are those situated in the micro-structure of classrooms where literature is taught and studied as a compulsory subject for the examinations which will select, among many thousands, the few hundreds considered best suited and equipped intellectually and socio-culturally to enter the academic realm of universities.

Such selection will depend on suitability rather than on intelligence, competence, or aptitude. Literature education, although playing a quantitatively minor part in that system, is highly representative of the whole process. As a compulsory subject, literature must be studied by all students at secondary level, regardless of personal preference or academic bias. It so happens that not even one

among the students I interviewed declared to like the subject for its contents, or to enjoy literary classroom practices, making it clear that they only took literature because they had to.

Although syllabuses are determined by State legislators in the education field, their validation is confirmed by the authority of leading State or Federal universities, which publicise their prescribed lists of contents to be covered for their separate *vestibular* examinations. With minor variations, all of them enforce the positivist paradigm installed at the turn of last century, by the Republican military, and founded on the study of literary history.

I can see at least two major contradictions in such syllabuses. The first is the discrepancy between the stated aims for literature education, always situated around the axis of personal, social, and cultural fulfilment, and the contents, which are based on the chronological and uncritical description of social, economic, political and geographical facts justifying the literary production of a given time, at a given part of the country, and for given - more often than not historical - reasons. As such, it is the situation of literary production that counts, not the social, cultural, economic and political reading factors. The whole process is focused on the past, and history serves only as a static background to explain the layers of canonical values not only unchallenged, but mainly stratified by the study of literature.

State secondary students are not the majority in post-compulsory schooling because of the system's deviation from its Constitutional commitment, visible in the inadequacy of public primary education, as well as in the reduced number of State-supported secondary schools. This clearly shows the State's omission and the ideological option for leaving the working classes unassisted, destined to remain less schooled. Modern education in Brazil has been officially planned to cater for the general public, since the 1930 Constitution, which guaranteed free and equal education for all, and after 1971, made compulsory up to age 14. It has failed, according to Florestan Fernandes, for lack of creative capacity, as the Republic did not create education models founded on 'capitalist economy, scientific technology, and democratic regime', omitting itself from its role as an educating State, withdrawing from its responsibility as founder of schools and supervisor of the

national system of education.<sup>1</sup> If all students remained at school to conclude their primary education - years one to eight - a much larger number would wish to go on to secondary education, therefore requiring an equally larger number of State places than the present provision, in order to satisfy public demand. At present, the assimilation and accommodation of the middle classes in the domain of private education has been shaken by their insolvency, and the impossibility of paying twice for secondary education (indirectly through taxes, and directly to private schools). The recent return of the middle classes to public secondary education has brought social turmoil to ill-equipped, understaffed, derelict schools, besides having evicted those who had been their habitual clientele for two decades, the children of the working classes, from their classrooms, forced either to stay out of or look for cheap alternatives in the private system. The State withdrawal is evident, for example, in the fact that Guavatown, examined in this study, has 500,000 inhabitants, and can only count on the provision of nineteen State secondary schools, which also serve the peripheral population from neighbouring towns.

With the official abolition of entrance exams, public secondary schools have supposedly been non-selective, and for the public, who are allocated places on a first-come, first-served basis. But what is, then, the profile of those students, who attend State secondary schools? Who is the clientele aimed for by university planners, and what interests lie behind syllabuses and programmes of studies? Whose history has been privileged in the literature curriculum? By trying to determine the profile of the clientele presently attending public secondary schools, as described in section B of Chapter II, I found out that the majority of secondary students attending classes at the two leading State schools in Guavatown was female, non-white, and working-class. It is crucial to determine the ways in which they are represented in - or omitted from - syllabuses which, as a rule, describe their objectives as

to recognise Brazilian literature as an element of nationality, as an element of production, conservation and transmission of Brazilian culture, and of basic human expression, aiming to amplify cultural horizons and vital experience through the development of reading habits as well as the deepening of literary knowledge<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis was made by Florestan Fernandes, in *Educação e Sociedade no Brasil*, p. 4. Apud Romanelli (1985), op cit., p 69

<sup>2</sup> As stated by the literature department at Springhill, but not the least different from the habitual paradigm of aim statements by State schools.

At no point is there any reference in literary syllabuses to gender, race, or class issues. In fact, there is no representation of readers, and multicultural subjectivities and individualities are not catered for. The general rule is to introduce some basic concepts borrowed from communication theory, as a set of points to remember, before tackling the heavily deterministic history-centred programme. Other kinds of history are not considered, since their non-canonical settings might endanger the immutability of literary contents as presently forced on students, and on teachers.

The other fundamental contradiction in literature curricula is the discrepancy between the time allocated for literature at school, and the width and extension of its programme of studies, with a heavy amount of literary history to be memorised, plus set texts for reading, interpretation and analysis, all to be ultimately assessed in a barely significant number of questions which, in recent papers, have required no real study, and little effective literature teaching. Therefore, literature education is denied its role in the development of 'amplifying cultural horizons and vital expression', and even less 'developing reading habits', or 'deepening literary knowledge', because it has been compressed into a one-thousand-page textbook mathematically divided into three years of fast-paced reading, a symbol of the present state of socio-political contradictions in Brazilian culture.

### ***What teachers do and say***

Democracy, writes Giroux,

is both a discourse and a practice that produces particular narratives and identities in-the-making informed by the principles of freedom, equality, and social justice. It is expressed not in moral platitudes but in concrete struggles and practices that find expression in classroom social relations, everyday life, and memories of resistance and struggle. When wedded to its most emancipatory possibilities, democracy encourages all citizens to actively construct and share power over those institutions that govern their lives.<sup>3</sup>

The present social mix in Brazilian State schools can be a concrete sign of democratic education, which may help to understand how individual subjectivities

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<sup>3</sup> Henry A. Giroux (1993) *Living Dangerously: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*, p 13

are formed and found within complex and contradictory social formations. However, curricular contents have a crucial role in it.

### **Upbringing and the Profession**

With a majority of female students, not even one woman writer could be found in the various programmes; in a country with a history of wholesome miscegenation, there is only one black author to be found, Cruz e Souza, for the simple reason that he is the best known Symbolist poet in Brazil. Non-white authors dealing with race problems are automatically out of the canon. With an impressive number of contemporary writers of prose and poetry, there is no space in literature education for literary texts which deal with the military dictatorship, with the multicultural contrasts and characteristics inside the country, between genres, classes, and their cultures. In fact, syllabuses present a tailored organisation of contents up to the literary produced in the 1930s. It is possible to consider that the canon presently found was designed by the First Republican legislators, and have remained almost untouched to this day.

However, literature education has failed students not only in terms of its programmed contents, syllabuses gaps, omissions and contradictions; classroom practices have also been judged little satisfactory by those involved. Whereas teachers blame the system, the State, the legislators, the canon, and many times, the students, not many literature professionals take an inward look at their own formation, their literary-pedagogical competence, and their political role as educators of generations of Brazilians. The most common classroom practices were seen founded on strategies of *love*, or of *silence*, both aiming at control - the former substituting affection for knowledge, the latter as a mode of preventing 'asking'.

The values instilled in teachers' formative years point to literature as fulfilling, enriching, culturing. Some Brazilian teachers acknowledge the theoretical vacuum found in their training, centred on positivist concepts and didactic strategies. The pleasure and model role which influenced their choices to become literature educators has not occurred among their own students, indicating that something has changed, apart from the social class gap between teachers and their students.



Societal changes in recent years have placed a value on science and technology, or in more goal-oriented areas such as media, communication, or cinema studies. In recent years, literature has been a discipline at risk of being evicted from school curricula, not only for its association with cultural heritage and conservative values, but also because of its apparent lack of identity and practicality in today's society. The canon has a large responsibility for such state of things.

There seems to be a wide gap between academic proposals of critical pedagogies and classroom contents and practices in Brazil. Venturelli<sup>4</sup> considers two main axes of thought and action for literature education. The first focuses on the literary discourse *per se*, in order to determine its specific profile, while the second focuses on the social situation of literary production, since no work of art is created randomly, or in a social vacuum. Only after dealing with both aspects is it possible to embark with students on the understanding of implicit discourses inside literary texts. Venturelli argues for a view of classroom practice in literature education, in general, as a subject of studies aiming at students' essay-writing, debate participating, in order to become tomorrow's critical citizens, against the view of literature as *a sign of, not a sign for*<sup>5</sup> commonly found in Brazilian schools. The 'sign-of' literary view situates texts as artefacts for immediate pragmatic use, with uncritical pedagogic objectives, therefore emptied of their aesthetic qualities. Venturelli adds that literature cannot be fixed by norms, by characteristics of literary periods and schools of thought, because it carries the mark of transgression which directs the creative work of so-called 'good writers'. Thus, he adds, biography and historiography as components of literary nationalism do not suffice in order to explain the literary act. As explained by Reis<sup>6</sup>, those components of nationalism privilege a totality, and consequently fail not only to emphasise internal differences, but also to deal with human distinction inside social spaces. History should be understood, instead, as a *problem* in which its constituting social practices must be submitted to constant re-thinking.

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<sup>4</sup> Paulo Venturelli (1990) 'A Literatura na Escola', in *Revista Letras*, n. 39, Editora da Universidade Federal do Paraná.

<sup>5</sup> Décio Pignatari, Interview with, in M. T. Fraga Rocco (1981) *Literatura/ Ensino: uma problemática*. São Paulo: Ática.

<sup>6</sup> Roberto Reis (1993) 'Espelho Retrovisor: Considerações sobre a Transição Brasileira', in *Travessia*, n. 27, Ana Luiza Andrade (org.), Editora da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Neither Venturelli's bi-axial focus, nor Reis' changing view of historical facts was ever experienced in any of the literature classrooms observed. Above all, there seemed to be a restricted epistemological foundation in literary-pedagogical practices, apparently ruled by the textbooks adopted. Much power was placed on the digestion of textbook knowledge and truth, without any consideration of theoretically founded criticism of any kind.

Lawrence argues that to 'open' the canon, for some conservative organisations, corresponds to an act of violence, to destroy *the citadel of tradition* on which political values are settled. To revise literary tradition and the canon reflects ideological struggle rather than a natural aesthetic order, as suggested by Lawrence, perhaps because 'literary canons disguise their own histories of violence'<sup>7</sup>. Therefore the conflicts produced are those perceived in the classrooms observed, and through the voices of those heard, which means that they occur on the levels of production and reception. The maintenance of a positivist tradition of literary history is an attempt to neutralise, or erase conflict. Batsleer et al state that literary discourse occupies a position

that enables it to displace and supplant historical, social and, above all, political analysis of cultural activity as too narrow, parochial and partisan and to offer itself as a *totalizing* explanation, ecumenical, disinterested and classless.<sup>8</sup>

The literary canon can be compared to *a gentlemen's agreement*, 'invoking the class and gender bias disguised behind the gentility of canonization'<sup>9</sup>, with an apparent separation between art and politics. Lawrence points out that modernist manifestos stressing the formal properties of art helped 'discredit the ties between literature and immediate political and social concerns' (p 4). Whereas it is not difficult to comprehend the phenomenon of implicit disinterestedness of the literary canon in political matters in colonising nations, it is more complicated to understand the maintenance of an ideology of repression in formerly colonised countries, such as Brazil, throughout nearly two centuries - independence from Portugal was won in 1822. Bhabha has written about the doubleness in colonial discourse, an ambivalence that contradictorily reinscribes both coloniser and

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<sup>7</sup> Karen R Lawrence (ed.) (1992) *Decolonizing Tradition*, 'Introduction', Univ. of Illinois Press, p 2

<sup>8</sup> Batsleer et al (1985) *Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class*, p 27

<sup>9</sup> As defined by Lillian S. Robinson in 'Treason our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon' in Elaine Showalter (ed.) (1985) *The New Feminist Criticism*, p 106. Apud Lawrence, op cit., p 4

colonised. The agonistic uncertainty found in the incompatibility of empire and nation 'puts on trial the very discourse of civility within which representative government claims its liberty and empire its critics'.<sup>10</sup>

The other political action closely regarding syllabuses and programmes should be aimed at teacher formation and the integration of textual reading and informative knowledge with a critical view of literary theories. The Brazilian teachers interviewed became insecure when asked questions about theoretical knowledge, always confused with historical-biographical data as some sort of static knowledge which 'refuses confrontation with the world as the true source of knowledge with its different levels and phases' (Freire, p 98). Universities do not privilege *theory* as a central subject, and many times the various departments do not have a theory, harbouring many theories without any clear way to integrate them. The function of theory should be to contextualize and pull together other courses. However, what happens is the offer of a succession of methodological models, each with a corresponding pedagogy, 'from linguistic philology to positivist literary history to New Critical explication, all of which now remain as geological strata overlaid by the new theories and methodologies'.<sup>11</sup> As such, '*attracting students to reading*' becomes a quest for some magical spell specially gifted teachers may possess and, if lucky, may achieve to cast on their students; '*knowing what is going on*' becomes an informative pedestal only accessible to those few whose range of reading, wider and more comprising than the majority's, may conduct the orchestra of students towards making inferences and filling gaps of general knowledge, which does not necessarily correspond to empowering them as full citizens. '*Giving them the syllabus*', in a one-way direction, is the only role left to the average teacher of literature, a role which offers little personal-professional fulfilment in its pursuit of impersonal objectivity.

### **Teachers and Scholars, Teachers or Scholars, Teachers versus Scholars**

In the past, teachers in Brazil were one of the pillars of society, with the doctor, the priest, and/or the judge. This image has disappeared, and the present

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<sup>10</sup> Homi Bhabha (1994) *The Location of Culture*, 'Sly Civility' pp 95-6

<sup>11</sup> Gerald Graff 'Taking Cover in Coverage', in Cain (ed.) (1994), op cit., pp 9-11

impoverishment of the teaching profession has placed them/us together with the less privileged, with a low social worth allied to an even lower self-esteem.

The cause of the distinction between teachers and scholars is placed in the realm of socio-political worth, rather than in the intellectual field per se. For instance, I found that Beth, at Homer School, had some knowledge of literary theories, of literary texts, and pedagogical philosophies, visible during the observation of her classes, and later confirmed at the interview. She was a published writer of language and literature textbooks, with considerable selling success. However, she vehemently denied being 'an intellectual', since she worked inside classrooms, not at the university; because her books aimed at students, not for academic discussion. As such, she found the 'scholar' label above her, besides requiring a kind of knowledge only attainable through a return to the academy, for a post-graduate research course.

The hierarchical separation between teachers and scholars indicates the hierarchical division between doers and thinkers, between workers and theorists, between the hands and the brain, as if they could be separated. At present, teachers of literature simply arrange on a pedagogical tray the little nutritious meal imposed on them by their training, and served by textbooks. Thinking and theorising are for those few placed inside the academy. Graff has signalled the problem of keeping students apart from the conflicts and conceptual discussions, only to present them with the stale products of uncritical models. Literature undergraduates do not have a say in the arrangement of knowledge they should be co-constructing. Also at the Brazilian university, strategies of *love* and *silence* are found at the basis of intellectual passivity and educational sterility. Hierarchy is invoked as a protecting shield against participatory learning, and students will remain outside the debates that affect them, a situation to be repeated by them as classroom teachers.

The absence of theory in curricula, both at university and at school, supports the 'disconnected empiricism of positivist literary history and formalist explication'<sup>12</sup>, under the belief that facts will make a sense and produce meanings by themselves.

It is imperative to consider the current socio-economic situation of teachers in Brazil, who have gradually become part of the country's proletariat: the long

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<sup>12</sup> G Graff 'Taking Cover...', in Cain (ed.) (1994), op cit., p 3

working hours, the difficult working conditions, the process of alienation and devaluation of the teaching profession, the extremely low salaries, everything contributes to their descending social self-image and consequent identification with other lowly workers. Literature teachers had often been seen as repositories of written art, and expected to dominate an ever-increasing range of literary knowledge and reading. The truth is that, at present, teachers cannot afford to buy books, subscribe to journals, or literary magazines; reading for leisure or self-fulfilment has become a utopia: not uncommonly, teachers associate textual reading with didactic reading for lesson preparation<sup>13</sup>. Pucci et al<sup>14</sup> point as the only advantage of this state of things the fact that teachers in general have learned from other workers how to fight for the class's interests, through their processes of organisation and struggle around unions and syndicates. However, organisation and struggle, in the past decade, have taken the form of strikes, the effects of which for the achievement of the desired goals have been irrelevant. Usually it is the students who have been penalised by the long strikes; taking little notice of teachers' political action, the State makes a saving by keeping schools closed. The main distinction between teachers and other workers lies in the fact that, rather than a 'locus of work' in its original sense, the school is a locus of information distribution, with a limited range power over social modifications<sup>15</sup>.

Literature education in Brazil has suffered from a series of dichotomies both in its founding theories and in its pedagogical practices, which compromise the achievement of the 'highest standards'. Teachers-to-be are trained in literature history, which is basically the sort of content knowledge expected from them when in charge of their own classes. Literary theories remain a separate study of the main lines of thought used by contemporary critics, from hermeneutics to post-structuralism. However, it is demanded that teachers adopt a critical stance with hardly any epistemological foundation, built from intuition and empirical common sense, which may fall into empty moralistic denunciation and vacuous populist

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<sup>13</sup> As found in the research with supporting data collected through questionnaires, described and analysed in my M. Ed. dissertation *A Dinamização da Leitura em Bibliotecas Escolares*, Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal Fluminense, August 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Bruno Pucci, N.R. Oliveira, V. Sguissardi (1991) 'O Processo de Proletarização dos Trabalhadores em Educação', in *Teoria e Educação*, 4: Dossiê: Interpretando o Trabalho Docente.

<sup>15</sup> Mena Barreto Abrahão (1990) 'As Relações Educação e Trabalho na Escola do não-trabalho' in *Anais da 42a. Reunião Anual SBPC*, vol. II, S. Paulo/Porto Alegre

enthusiasm as a consequence. The difficulty and complexity of 'varieties of criticism' - literary, philosophical and social - bewilder and alienate students and readers of it, of which teachers are a part<sup>16</sup>, remaining incapable of transforming purely theoretical (academically constructed) discourses into everyday classroom practices.

The practices observed seemed to concentrate on two pivoting forces mutually reinforcing, without challenging the ethnocentric, anti-democratic, socially divisive discourse: the strategy of love, and the strategy of forced silence, which lay behind much classroom action. Love took the form of emotional control against resistance and opposition, buttressing ideological inequalities, while silence was used in some classrooms as an equally silencing, coercive form of oppression. Martha's inadequacy and self-consciousness hid behind an emotional attachment with her students, and the whole paradigm at Figtree was founded on 'love' as a vocational element. Silence was imposed on students in various forms, especially in the denial of a pedagogy<sup>17</sup> of asking. Students thus immobilised are expected to cease to 'create, mobilize and secure particular desires' (Giroux 93, p 117).

### **The concept of 'difficulty' for literature teachers**

Literature teachers in Brazil find it difficult, above all, to mediate classroom reality and academic literature education. They have an insurmountable problem with the canon, imposed by a power they do not dare to confront, with the social utopia which has promised them a classroom full of ready-made readers, skilfully literate, sensitive to literary powers, knowledgeable and intuitive, with a deep-settled interest in the study of the history and the high culture of their country via literary history. But they also have a serious problem with themselves, as literature professionals: they feel they have not yet read enough, they are dissatisfied with syllabuses, programmes, schools, students, exams, themselves.

The easy culprit is the student. She has not got enough of anything that is required in teachers' utopia in order to study literature and is also, in the education tug-of-war, the weaker side. Also, by blaming students and their numerous 'lacks',

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<sup>16</sup> As stated by Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., pp 5, 26

<sup>17</sup> Giroux's conception of *pedagogy* is that of 'a form of cultural work which involves the production of knowledge and social identities'. 1993, *Living Dangerously*, p 4

teachers get to a dead end in which nothing much is left other than 'try their best', by reading from the textbook, by *love* or *silence*.

The other side of conceptual difficulty, unvoiced by teachers, is found in the domain of theoretical knowledge. Although writing about the situation in America, some of the points raised by Gerald Graff provide a source of useful discussion about the situation in Brazil. For instance, Graff denounces the situation of isolation between university departments, which fails to develop in training teachers the ability to develop critical thinking, conceptual 'problematization', or a theoretical border-crossing between areas of knowledge and fundamental theories. That is possibly the main reason why Brazilian teachers of literature do not see themselves as intellectuals, even though some are writers; the theories on which they base their writing are founded on empirical pragmatism, and do not seem to consistently propose novel lines of thought, a role teachers feel to belong to the higher domain of academic scholarship.

The specific political engagements which lie at the foundation of meaning construction and use affect literary production and consumption, determining who enters (as well as who is evicted from) the canon, and what students will read. Given the powerful role of schooling, the literature canon, or the socio-political importance of determining who writes, who publishes, who reads, who interprets, who teaches - and the modes of reading, interpreting, and teaching - can preserve or transform the structure of social relations. The questions of voice and representation in literature education classrooms in Brazil demand a revision of the canon, of the programme of contents, and of teaching-learning methods which are imbricated and interwoven with the politics of the country. Given the urgency of socio-cultural matters over issues such as gender and sex, students indicated clearly the sort of cultural heritage the literature canon ought to privilege, when arguing for more authors and texts dealing with the recent political events. Moreover, the contents prescribed by literature syllabuses reinforce the strategy of *inadequacy*, *difficulty* and *quantity*, while timely restricting the possibility of experimental strategies. Academic training for literature teachers fails to demonstrate the possibility and urgency of marginal readings, since access to theories - potentially politically dangerous - is estranged from the mainstream

emphasis on ready-made concepts, creating a vicious circle between the pedagogical process and the literary product destined to feed alienating practices.

Those of us who view education as practice of freedom cannot accept it as the rigid transmission of knowledge or culture, nor the deposition of reports or facts in the educatee. The transmission of knowledge, says Freire, kills knowledge; education cannot be anything else but communication and dialogue, the 'encounter of Subjects in dialogue in search of the significance of the object of knowing and thinking'(pp 137-8). Knowledge starts with the awareness of knowing little, as human beings are constantly creating and re-creating knowledge. What teachers judge as the non-existence of reading habits and previous literary knowledge, to Freire, is a lack of faith in people, and the mistaken statement of absolute ignorance of others, of students. On doing so, teachers practice the 'alienation of ignorance', always present in students, never in themselves. Teachers with those characteristics are never ready for dialogue, which they consider a waste of time, disregarding the fact that knowledge can only be built up 'in the relations between human beings and the world, relations of transformation, and perfects itself in the critical problematization of these relations' (p 107).

Literature education (and its array of critical-creative possibilities) has been denied its function by the imposition of positivist contents, by the lack of relevant theoretical conceptualisation, by the vacuum caused by positivist curricula. It requires a programme of studies as an act of creation theoretically substantiated, capable of releasing other creative acts, which Freire defines as those in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity characterising search and invention (p 43). I cannot think of a better way to problematize literary contents than through the discussion of the various theories of reading, a knowledge which can empower students and teachers democratically in the search for meaningful interpretations of the literary artefact, and offer them culturally acknowledged readings.

### **Contents as 'Bits and Pieces'**

Given the limits of their role as 'de-intellectualized' professionals, teachers are not empowered to change, to create, or to challenge knowledge. Their social function inside classrooms is, then, limited to a mechanistic practice of joining



literary letters, words, and sentences. They are not required to reflect upon broader issues, to research, to criticise, to conclude, or to review contents, the canon, school practices, their own specific competence and political commitment. All they seem to need is a good command of functional literacy, which enables them to use textbooks, the facilitators of teachers' routine, and evidence that there is a canon, a syllabus, a programme of dates, names, and facts which self-justify the positivist paradigm. I do not mean to blame textbooks for teachers' disenfranchisement. In fact, they only represent the present state of intellectual loss by literature teachers and, consequently, by students.

When a teacher interviewed said she was unable to plan her lessons, that she was saved from daily chaos by the intervention of some last-minute insight, in the context of analysis she was declaring her dissatisfaction with the limits of textbook-contained practices, as seen from the teachers' end. She also opted out towards a parallel feature of literature, in which she believed, but which could only remain as an oddity, and act of playful, irresponsible deviation from the official syllabus. Because it is untouchable, the literature curriculum, allied to the a-critical training offered to teachers, raises no doubts, no debates, no uncertainties, while neither allowing experimentation or problematization. Because it is heavy and bulky, time is its biggest ally. One thousand pages must be read aloud, or in silence, and memorised, summarised, checked and briefed, for the five-question lottery of the exams. Boredom is its dorsal spine, for all involved. Variation only appears as sparse texts, poems, or short stories, some additional material, a little distraction in the interval between chapters of colonising literature history.

Contents are organised in small units, which control time and avoid waste of knowledge input. For instance, in the new collection considered superior to the other textbooks, by Campedelli, each chapter brings 'activities for reflection, creation and discussion', 'critical texts', and 'a studying plan with guided tasks'. The third book, aimed at third-year students, ends each unit with samples of papers from past vestibular exams. These papers are based on the memorisation of names, titles of works, lines from poems, periods' characteristics. The 'study guides' ask students to give 'their opinion, their reflection, their attention'<sup>18</sup>, although there

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<sup>18</sup> Writers' biographies provide information such as 'born on Rua Aurora, in São Paulo, on 9 October 1893; his father, Dr. C.A. Andrade, of humble origin, was an energetic and hard-working petit-bourgeois who played a strong moral influence on his son. The mother, loving and

does not seem to be much for reflection, attention, or opinion, given the present state of classroom *banking* practices.

Teachers then are led to believe that the 'bits and pieces' of literary information disguised as literary knowledge, which fill the pages of literature textbooks, are all that seems to matter, in order to achieve the ultimate goal of as high as possible a number of passes in the vestibular exams. 'Bits and pieces', a teaching practice found more overtly in some classrooms in England, also appeared in Brazil through the addition of spare poems, cuttings from newspapers, excerpts from short stories.

Raymond Williams, in 1958, used the words *industry*, *democracy*, *class*, *art*, and *culture* as the key to the map of wider changes in life and thought from the last decades of the eighteenth century. He identified the problem as one of 'adapting our social training to a widely literate culture', since 'the highest standards of literacy in contemporary society depend on a level of instruction and training far above that which is commonly available' (p 298). Williams identified the content of education with the content of our social relations, and so, changes could only occur as part of a wider change.<sup>19</sup> That leaves the question of whether Brazilian literature teachers and students can become - and to what extent - agents of empowerment. To em-power, as 'to give authority, to enable, to license', requires an agent (even the self, in the case of self-empowerment), as explained by Gore. Thus, the concept of empowerment places an enormous constraint on teachers' work, for the contradiction between the modes of working in unchanging patriarchal institutions, for instance, and at the same time arguing for the construction of critical pedagogies within discourses of social regulation.<sup>20</sup>

How do teachers cope with the maintenance of official syllabuses and at the same time favour the discourse of political empowerment? Gore writes that 'to em-power suggests that power can be given, provided, controlled, held, conferred,

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understanding, was D. Maria Luísa.' It sounds sexist, moralistic, acritical, and enforces the positivist public vs. private distribution of family roles.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams (1968) *Culture and Society: 1780 - 1950*. London: Penguin Books., pp. 298-9

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Gore (1992) 'What We Can Do For You! What *Can* "We" Do For "You"? Struggling over Empowerment in Critical and Feminist Pedagogy', in C. Luke & J. Gore (eds) *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*. In this article, Gore discusses the issues related to power and empowerment at school.

taken away'<sup>21</sup>, a role schools have performed 'as complexes of dominant and subordinate cultures, each ideologically linked to the power they possess to define and legitimate a particular construction of reality'.<sup>22</sup> A contradiction lies, for instance, in the amount of informative materials to be 'covered' in three years, in 90-minute weekly meetings, whether following textbooks or handouts; students must learn about the historical setting in which different periods of literature took place, as well as facts about authors' lives, and formal characteristics of literary artistic movements - all to be mastered for the exams. 'What for', is the question they ask themselves: as aiding resource of historic studies and knowledge, or as reinforcement of Brazilian culture? There is no time provision for reflection on texts, for discussion of socio-cultural issues and critical readings, and neither teachers nor students are ever asked about what they think of literature syllabuses in Brazil. A proposal for 'empowering' students in such context seems hardly possible, as it would require a demystification of canonical knowledges and impositions, and a clarification of the rules of domination which so far subordinates subjects marked by gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, as pointed out by Luke and Gore (p.1).

According to Paulo Freire, the Brazilian tradition has been to *dictate* ideas, not to exchange them.

By giving the student formulas to receive and store, we have not offered him [sic] the means for authentic thought; assimilation results from search, from the effort to re-create and re-invent.<sup>23</sup>

Freire adds that education as the practice of freedom is not the mere transmission of knowledge or cultures, nor the depositing of reports or facts in the educatee, which perpetuates the values of a given culture, and attempts to adapt the educatee to the milieu<sup>24</sup>. Freire views knowledge as *problem-posing*, in the sense that *problematization* is a dialectic process; in such view, syllabuses should pose problems concerning the human being and the world, allowing them to enter it critically, in an interplay between cultural permanence and change. For that, the

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<sup>21</sup> Gore (1992) op cit., p 57

<sup>22</sup> P. McLaren (1989) *Life in Schools: An Introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. New York & London: Longman, p. 200, analysing the position assumed by Henry Giroux. Quoted in Gore (1992), op cit., p 58

<sup>23</sup> Paulo Freire (1976) *Education: The Practice of Freedom*, London: Writers and readers Publishing Cooperative, p 38.

<sup>24</sup> Freire (1976), op cit., p 147

whole structure should also be problematized: 'the point of departure of the dialogue is the quest for a curriculum', which must be as theoretically founded as possible. Thus, the Brazilian literature curriculum lacks a *theory of intervention in reality*, the analytical contact with living experiences essential to *substantiate* and to experience that existence in full. Because the literature curriculum is disconnected from life, 'centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent, lacking in concrete activity', it does not manage to develop a critical consciousness<sup>25</sup>.

### Literature education, pedagogical fiction, political facts

In its quest for specific knowledge, literature education in Brazil aims at docile and passive subjects whose instinctive curiosity is denied, gradually disappearing from classrooms. Syllabuses deny searching, invention and reinvention. According to Freire,

in the learning process the only person who really learns is s/he who appropriates what is learned, who apprehends and thereby re-invents that learning; s/he who is able to apply the appropriate learning to concrete existential situations. On the other hand, the person who is filled by another with "contents" whose meaning s/he is not aware of, which contradict his or her way of being in the world, cannot learn because s/he is not challenged.<sup>26</sup>

Teaching methods are a powerful mediating filter for or against students' engagement with a discipline of studies, in the production of meanings 'through which students construct their individual and collective futures', combining the language of self and social criticism with specific knowledge possibilities<sup>27</sup>. A crucial pedagogical matter, the problem of teaching and learning methods reveals unequal power relations rooted in discursive and non-discursive forms which appear through symbolic representations. As cultural production, pedagogy is part of the construction and organisation of knowledge, desires, values, and social practices, with possibilities for renewed and newly created realms in and out of the classroom founded on less unequal relations and principles between students, teacher and students, and the outer society<sup>28</sup>. As a process of understanding and

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<sup>25</sup> Freire also warns against the mistaken identification of theory with verbalism. He finds that education in Brazil lacks theory, tending towards abstraction, which actually intensifies naiveté. Op cit., p 37

<sup>26</sup> Freire (1976), op cit., Preface to 'Extension or Communication', p 88

<sup>27</sup> Henry Giroux (1994) *Disturbing Pleasures*. New York: Routledge. 'Schools for Scandal', p 64

<sup>28</sup> According to Giroux, 'creating new public spheres and alliances in which the principles of equality, liberty, and justice become the primary organizing principles not only for structuring

analysing texts as socio-cultural products, literature education provides optimum access to different aspects of the construction and organisation of knowledge. As Giroux states, pedagogy is about 'the creation of a public sphere, one that brings people together in a variety of sites to talk, exchange information, listen, feel their desires, and expand their capacities for joy, love, solidarity, and struggle', rather than a discipline (p x). Practices as those previously narrated do not expand concepts related to literary representations, nor do they address classroom engagement in such representations towards comprehension and signification.

Although contents are factual, dealing with the history of past events in linear, chronological and static layers, there is little space in literature teaching and learning for present time, real life, current issues. Whereas it is a schematic representation of a historical past, halting before the complexity of the present prevents the organisation of literature as 'a chest of drawers' with division and compartments for isolated units. There is some basic contradiction in the positivistic treatment of a post-modern world.

It seems important to consider how transformative the denial of official syllabuses can be, when alternative contents are presented randomly, dissociated from set structures. The absence of a theoretical foundation when aiming at empowering students runs the risk of being justified through resorting to 'assistencialist'<sup>29</sup> practices. To many teachers, the present history-based paradigm is not ideal. However, its attempt to objectively quantify knowledge represents the social ideal of equal opportunities for all, through the explicit denial of differences. As Carter and Long write, studying literature can hinder the use of literature as a resource; teaching and examining may privilege knowledge *about* literature (facts about literary contents, dates, authors, titles of texts, names of conventions, literary terms, etc.) over knowledge *of* literature<sup>30</sup>. A curriculum based upon an anti-dialogic organisation of educational activities contains an ideology of domination

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relationships between the self and others, but also for creating new social movements' (1994, p 65)

<sup>29</sup> As explained in a footnote in Freire (1976) op cit., p. 113, 'assistencialism' is a term used in Latin America to describe policies of financial or social 'assistance' which attack symptoms, but not causes, of social ills. Freire defines it as 'an especially pernicious method of trying to vitiate popular participation in the historical process', as it contradicts man's natural vocation as Subject by treating the recipient as a passive object, incapable of participating in the process of his own recuperation; and also it contradicts the process of "fundamental democratization". Op cit., p 15

<sup>30</sup> Ron Carter & Michael N. Long (1991) *Teaching Literature*, Essex, Longman, p 4

not always perceived by its users. Thus, teachers not always know how to provide a bridge between the contents held by students and the literary proficiency they are supposed to achieve, failing as educators to reconstruct the act of knowing.

‘Attracting students to reading’, ‘knowing what is going on’, and ‘giving them the syllabus’, in the case of literature education policies and classroom practices in Brazilian secondary schools, are issues connected with dialogical actions rarely found in the various spheres of power. On the one hand, there is no visible dialogical action between school teachers, students, policy makers, teacher educators and academics, towards reconsidering the role of a history-founded literature programme, a discussion essential for the enforcement of democratic states. Literature education has been given a lesser value in the general education panorama. And although some authors<sup>31</sup> argue for a desecration of literature in classroom practices, recommending the use of literary and non-literary works for reading and analysis, I fear that, in Brazilian secondary schools, this may reinforce the socio-cultural differences and add to the political disenfranchisement of State school populations. Far from considering literature a superior realm to which working-class students must be stimulated to ascend, my position is, contrarily, that literature (in its various forms), as a fundamental representation of cultural art, should be accessible to and experienced by all, starting from the early years of schooling. In my view, this would empower populations by including them in the sphere of cultural decisions, and would contribute to avoid their manipulation by the mass media, for instance, which imposes mythical explanations of people’s reality. Literature education as such would offer means to resist *uprooting* tendencies consequential to uncritical *domestication*, and give voice to those who have been silenced<sup>32</sup> in the creation and development of social cultures (Freire, 34).

Batsleer et al emphasise that ethnography has an intensely democratic impulse, against the temptation to speak too readily on other people’s behalf - ‘any account of an activity that ignores or marginalizes the experience and understanding of those directly engaged in it can hardly claim much accuracy or authenticity’, despite the immensely powerful and pervasive ideologies that shape

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<sup>31</sup> Gunther Kress (1995); Ron Carter & Michael Long (1991), among others.

<sup>32</sup> Voice and silence are rather problematic concepts, treated in depth by Mimi Orner; Freire (1976) also warns that silence not always signify an absence of response, but rather a response which lacks a critical quality - op cit., p 24

all practical language and culture.<sup>33</sup> That is why the voices of those met in the process of viewing classrooms have been included as an integral part of this description and analysis, with their sometimes unexpected contradictions, dilemmas and complicating factors which require multifarious, non-linear explanations.

### ***Students as Learners and Thinkers***

The starting point to engage students in the debate and the understanding of literature education is to know them, in order to be able to start reflecting upon and from their own experience. The students interviewed raised points which, in more than one way, deal with some crucial issues which represent the ambiguities set at the core of Brazilian society. Between classroom strategies, economic difficulties, inadequate syllabuses and social inequalities, they allowed their autobiographies to enter the realm of decision thinking, specially when asked 'what they would do as teachers of literature'. Most students were able to place problems in a higher sphere than personal empathies, likes or dislikes. Where some of them demanded that 'the formal syllabus should be followed, through epochs, styles', perhaps trying some variation and more textual analysis, but concentrating on political problems, I could perceive an attempt to accept the doubleness of a reactionary canon plus silencing curriculum in order to be able to appropriate the dominant discourse, either to become part of it, or to contend with it for their class interests.

One necessary requirement, I think, for the empowering, problematized construction of literary-pedagogical knowledge, is for teachers to bring their knowledge of the discipline into contact with students', and together develop the critical abilities necessary for to make reasoned choices in both academic work and in life. Literature education as a whole seemed to have disappointed the students interviewed, as they had expected different contents, with more textual analysis, and more 'solid knowledge'. One of the students suggested the combination of the formal syllabus, with its inevitable bio-historical approach, with *serious* textual analysis of canonical texts from Brazilian literature, some of which he had - exceptionally - already read on his own.

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<sup>33</sup> J. Batsleer et al, op cit., p 146

In general terms, what seems to occur is the internalisation of guilt, that is, students often blame themselves for not knowing something. School curricula signal, in a variety of ways, a lack of respect for students' intellectual contributions - as representative of social classes, cultures, and individual choices - without engaging them in the academic enterprise in ways to ensure success. But teachers themselves are not engaged either, and the 'coverage' and 'exposure' teaching strategies represent metaphorically the entire process, as found in Brazil.

By demanding, for instance, that '*we ought to study the literature of Brazil*', *especially of recent times*'<sup>34</sup>, a student was asking for reading material which he considered culturally and politically meaningful, a request that reflects a growing awareness of newly-acquired socio-political and cultural values, which has been debated in the academy, but has not yet been practised or applied at through teachers' training or didactic textbooks. Whilst school literature education still requires the reading of Portuguese texts and travellers' informative writing about colonial Brazil, Latin-American and Portuguese-speaking African literatures remain out of Brazilian syllabuses. Much like the Brazilian, the literature produced in Latin America and Africa in recent years constitutes important literary representation of political struggles for democracy and freedom. Similarly, contemporary Brazilian texts have been omitted from explicit and implicit agendas, even those written by authors who have already been the theme of studies in doctoral theses, such as Rubem Fonseca and Hilda Hilst. The demand for a recognition of contemporary cultural values, to be studied in the literature education curriculum, is a request for the validation of current and recent issues related to the novel history of struggle for democracy in Brazil. To impose medieval European literature and semi-historic texts upon adolescents of all classes, as if those were the sole (and perennial) artistic representations of the national culture, has already been perceived by some of them as an attempt to silence, either through socio-political fear, or through pedagogical boredom.

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<sup>34</sup> 'I think that in literature we ought to study the literature of Brazil. To me, it's a waste to study Camões and other Portuguese writers who apparently have no influence on what we need, nor on what we are about to experience in real life. Very rarely will a teacher come and use a text about the dictatorship period, or Brazilian issues; given the choice, he will explore European issues. The lesson gets extremely boring, and we lose interest.' This was an eighteen-year-old student at Homer School, also from a labouring-class background.



The imposed memorisation of factual material allied to the anonymity of students in large classes point to a lack of interest in their intellectual, or political contribution, leading to the adoption of a passive role in their own education, ultimately to rely on the exams as external motivation (or de-motivation) to measure their 'learning' competence, rather than their intellectual development.

Interactive strategies and the figure of the charismatic teacher were marked as crucial, and determined by students through the mention to approaches based on 'talking and exchange', on 'being heard by the teacher'<sup>35</sup>, without being accused of 'idle talk' or 'making stupid questions', or even 'of being always wrong'. The discussion around political issues, political propaganda, and the educational system in Brazil, exposed most students' negative impression of politicians as corrupt, misleading and manipulating, against whom they needed to fight through adequate and accurate 'information'. When asked to determine whether there was any connection between studying literature and current issues, they mentioned 'enlarging your vision of the world', 'talking to people in a different way', 'becoming more cultured, with a wider vision field', while stressing that 'the real issue is the sort of relationship you have with it, which depends a lot on the teacher'. As such, although some students seemed to have been co-opted by the 'value-upgrading' spirit pervading the study of literature in general, the sort of cultural expansion others referred to may be an attempt to be able to articulate their dilemmas and the revolutionary potential of their marginalization.

Among many others (orality, leaving school to enter 'real life', pre-primary foundation, inter-textuality and multidisciplinary, time waste, punctuality, layering of subjects as *mille-feuille*, foreign influence upon nationness, dialogical pedagogies, contemporary versus old literature) three very important issues were raised by those students; first, that literature should lose its canonicist status, and be more centred on the critical reading of contemporary texts; second, that literature should be based upon Brazilian texts and authors, as an aiding resource to understand the concept of nation and national life; third, the requirement that literature be taught in association with history, a point also raised by some of the

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<sup>35</sup> 'The teacher says if you want you can ask anything, but if you ask something... it is not easy to ask... the teacher does not accept what you say, and you get so uneasy that you do not know what to say. You copy things into your copybook, it's all copied, and you don't do any thinking... you just sit there and that's it!' (male student at Homer, in Almir's class)

teachers interviewed, who resented the lack of interdisciplinarity in the programme of studies, and who seemed to agree that history, language and literature are 'the three great supporting pillars of national identity and national culture'.<sup>36</sup> It cannot be denied that the present paradigm of literature education in Brazil is totally based on a multifaceted focus which does not necessarily privilege literature over history. It so happens that both history and literature, as presently found, are pedagogically constructed as processes of cultural legitimisation of social contradictions. Instead of interdisciplinarity, what students and teachers require is possibly a pedagogy of border-crossing values organised around theories of critical identities, of visibility, which acknowledge the pluralization and diversification of positions in a society.

The last student interviewed at Homer, who at seventeen worked as ancillary staff in a kindergarten, exhibited a critical view of problems, probably originated in the discussion of what she called 'the Paulo Freire method', a practice of teaching literacy founded on the immediate child-surrounding universe. The cultural work done at her pre-primary school seemed to aim at mobilising knowledge and desires that might lead to significantly minimising the degree of oppression in some people's lives. By using reading texts she and her working colleagues tried to explain traces of identity to deprived, disabled children by providing a critical experience of democratic learning. Her quasi-professional experience offered a sharp contrast with the teaching-learning situation at Homer School, with stagnant contents often treated uncritically, and cultural differences interwoven with issues of power, authority, representation and identity, acutely revealed, for instance, in the absence of teachers.

By mentioning crucial points of cultural identity in classroom pedagogies, students referred to the setting of literature as a cultural subject requiring a review of its place in the curriculum, as well as its pedagogic realisation as a discipline of studies. The fact that some students identified themselves as keen readers, who resented the pedagogies used for literature at school, remained unnoticed by the system. The objective study of literature as a 'scientific', neutral, measurable discipline may be seen as a device to control what Claude Lefort has called 'the

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<sup>36</sup> Stuart Hall (1992) 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', apud Giroux (94) op cit., p 67

enigma of language', or the inter-relation of speech between a subject and the others and the subject and the self, which is circumscribed by an 'outside' control:

Only the authority of the master allows the contradiction to be concealed, but he is himself an object of representation; presented as possessor of the knowledge of the rule, he allows the contradiction to appear through himself.<sup>37</sup>

Some of Beth's students at Homer brought up issues of content relevance, teacher-taught relationship, boredom and distance from the subject, and when asked how they would teach literature, they suggested '*lots of different points and texts, creative planning, with lessons connecting with each other*'. In general, they seemed quite aware of the socio-political problems around the teacher shortage situation, which they blamed on 'a common, unnamed, shapeless enemy', hard to fight against. Considering that freedom of speech and of press have just been re-instated in the country in the last decade, there seems to have been a considerable development in people's views of socio-political problems. The infamous Brazilian profile as a culture of leisure and fun, far from accurate, has been imposed on the people by the rhetoric of power. The 'national character' has been described as cordial, peaceful and neutral, incapable of warfare, representing a unity of the nation which is at a time romantic and falsely metaphorical. As Bhabha wrote, *[n]ations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's eye.*<sup>38</sup> The internalisation of such character seems to lie at the root of the problem of political awareness, which intrinsically depends on the relationship between identity, culture, agency, and community as viewed by the self and by others. According to Bhabha, people are identified as

the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population<sup>39</sup>.

Especially at Figtree, my attempt to turn the conversation with both teachers and students into the political arena was apparently fruitless. The latter talked about the uselessness of voting, because there were '*a lot of promises, too little action, things just remain the same*', and '*it is safer to keep a distance from [politicians]*'. To the question about their relation to the subject, the point raised was that of difficulty, which they connected to the figure of the teacher and his/her

<sup>37</sup> Claude Lefort (1986) *The Political Forms of Modern Society*. Cambridge, Polity, p 213

<sup>38</sup> Bhabha, Homi K.(ed.) (1990) *Nation and Narration*, p.1

<sup>39</sup> Bhabha (1990) op cit., p 297

capacity to 'transmit' knowledge; or, on the other hand, to internalised guilt, blaming it on their own limited capacity to understand literary issues. Literature '*is complicated, too difficult, too many things to put out, but which keep locked up inside*'. And still, '*I don't understand everything, I get mixed up with too many things, too much information...*', a problem to be solved by the adoption of a methodology based on '*summarised information, which is better to understand, the more summarised the better*'. This same student opposed reading, a difficult activity, to watching television, which she enjoyed because it did not require a great level of attention, understanding, or learning - it comes pre-summarised for the spectator.

Literature is difficult because it '*requires studying*', although it is perceived as a secondary variation of language. However, students could appreciate language studies better, on the grounds that '*it made better sense*', with a similarly positivistic emphasis on the mechanics of grammar which prevented too much waste of time. Figtree students in general asked for a *traditional* method of literature education, teacher-centred and transmission-based, with '*copying from the board*', and aiming at production through quick and result-oriented approaches.

### ***Summing up***

Some students expected from teachers and the school system what seems to be a dilemma in the combination of relevant knowledge through active, critical interactive methods, whereas teachers expected from students a spontaneous knowledge combined with passive willingness to accept unfavourable situations, since the system is viewed as an immutable entity.

In a country where the main problem of inequality lies in the economic boundaries between classes, and their more often than not overt political policies, private school students stand better chances of entering public universities and competitive courses, not because methods there are more exciting, or teachers better formed, or even because basic learning materials (textbooks) are special. Private schools middle-class teachers and students, parents and administration have a common social, cultural, economic goal, and will not accept deception easily. There, it seems irrelevant whether or not literature offers a ground for systematic

social, cultural or political discussion, due to the need to complete the programme in due time. If it is true that students are bored, they are also relieved by the fact that teachers and textbooks offer no surprises, in a digestive consumption of the sort of literary studies demanded by *vestibulares*, by the academy, by a society concerned with explicit, factual, objective elements. As such, literature as a discipline of dates, names and facts, although far from provocative and lively, confirms a society contradictorily obsessed with transparency and democratic rights<sup>40</sup>, with overt modes of assessment and implicit rules, but which all the while reinforces inequality in the lack of resources for public education under the benevolent eyes of society in general. As Williams writes, 'deeply held and often unexamined attitudes are not amenable to laws or to slogans'<sup>41</sup>.

The whole problem addresses a question of disenfranchisement and of low social self-esteem among professionals, and among working-class students. After all, it seems utopian to demand for problematization and empowerment among those who have been left aside of/by the system.

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<sup>40</sup> Examinations, vivae, competitions are only validated if done as open and public. Vestibular exams have been computer assessed since 1969. Brazilian society has demanded very advanced socialist laws protecting labourers's rights, anti-racism, etc., some dating as far back as from the 1950s.

<sup>41</sup> John A Williams (1994) *Classroom in Conflict*, p 5

## CHAPTER SIX: Interpreting English evidence

In this chapter I attempt to interpret the combination of pedagogical paradigms, literary concepts, and socio-political structures of literature education described in Chapter Three. The two environments where more representative evidence has been collected seem to represent two distinct positions of English schooling: inner-city and home-county environments. However, despite local and individual differences, they are clearly part, at some level, of the same process of social, cultural and political representation of values through the *word* in its art form - literature - at times disguised in affective actions, but aiming at the politics of cultural maintenance. One major effect of literature studying is, rather than a response to literature, a response to the social processes surrounding the politico-pedagogical transaction with the discipline at school.

Harber describes how more democratic school structures can foster democratic values and skills: democratic education is not only possible but feasible, and do contribute to the participatory awareness, skills, and attitudes fundamental to life in democratic societies<sup>1</sup>. According to Batsleer et al, the ruling culture of Englishness is white, male and conservative, mistrustful of politics, as of culture, of theory, of critique, and resistant to its infiltration into everyday life; contradiction, ambiguities and absences, acknowledged or not, define the ground of cultural struggle.<sup>2</sup>

It has been argued that alternative, progressive, experimental pedagogies are more democratic and better equipped to teach critical awareness and socio-political engagement through the various subjects, including literature. After viewing lessons and interviewing literature teachers and students in different schools, I found that a provocative ambience for a wealthy clientele does not necessarily mean innovative classroom approaches and methods.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, exam-preparation lessons were seen to be performed rather traditionally, with an emphasis on knowledge and specific contents, with the highest possible level of examination passes set as the main target. I do not mean to say that all literature

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<sup>1</sup> Clive Harber, op cit., p. 24

<sup>2</sup> Batsleer et al (1985), op cit., pp 9-10

<sup>3</sup> Kress (95) op cit., p 119: 'Creativity [...] arises from novel uses of existing resources. It leaves the system intact.'

should be taught/learned in a similar manner, with an emphasis on cognition, because that is what examinations prescribe/ circumscribe. Teachers in general declare they do not teach for examinations; in practice, however, there is no exit other than preparing students to sit a number of papers, in which they will prove their competence as readers, and as formal writers. Or is there?

In his concluding chapter, among other relevant questions, Terry Eagleton asks what is the *point* of literary theory, why bother with it, what international politics has to do with literary theory<sup>4</sup>. He goes on to assert that literary theory has always been associated and interwoven with political beliefs and ideological values, offering its own perspective in which to view current history. Literary theory has helped, Eagleton states, to sustain and reinforce the assumptions of the political system, although engaged with social men and women. Literature 'reflects the values of a political system which subordinates the sociality of human life to solitary individual enterprise'<sup>5</sup>. Eagleton sees literature as a non-subject, defined only either in terms of its *methods* of enquiry, or in terms of its particular - and illusory - *object* of investigation; he quotes Roland Barthes: *Literature is what gets taught*, matching criticism and pedagogy, production, creation, and classroom consumption imbricated in a single form.

### ***Knowledge in Everyday Action***

As quoted from Exton in Chapter Three, literature education suffers from a double handicap: it is set in a rigidly hierarchical educational framework, and it operates within the English tradition of a firm separation between creation and criticism, between practice and theory.<sup>6</sup> I found in Bernstein that 'educational knowledge is a major regulator of the structure of experience' and formal education knowledge occurs through curriculum (defined as 'valid knowledge'), pedagogy (defined as 'valid transmission of knowledge') and evaluation (as a 'valid realisation of this knowledge' by the students)<sup>7</sup>. These elements are part of the description and analysis of the profile of two teaching structures, at the school and

<sup>4</sup> Terry Eagleton (1989) *Literary Theory: an Introduction*. Basil Blackwell, p. 194

<sup>5</sup> Eagleton (1989), op cit., pp 196-7

<sup>6</sup> R. Exton 'The Language of Literature', in Lee (ed.) (1986) *English Literature in Schools*, p 313

<sup>7</sup> Basil Bernstein. *Class, Codes and Control* vol. 1, Chapter 11, pp 202-3

at the college, and their cultures, 'made up of conflicting and contradictory discourses because of the "multiaccentuality of the sign".'<sup>8</sup>

...there has been a move away from the transmission of common values through a ritual order and control based upon position or status, to more personalised forms of control where teachers and taught confront each other as individuals. [...And] the selective organization, transmission and evaluation of knowledge is intimately bound up with patterns of authority and control. The battle over curricula is also a conflict between different conceptions of social order and is therefore fundamentally moral.<sup>9</sup>

If political education cannot be discussed through a participatory classroom pedagogy, deeper political values and attitudes will almost certainly not be available to conscious inspection, reflective action, or change, and citizenship runs the risk of being confused with manipulative, immediate welfare palliatives in the treatment of socio-political problems. The result is social control, rather than either democratic critical awareness, or an exercise in democratic learning<sup>10</sup>.

One of the models viewed in the English practice of literature education turns the triangle's apex towards an emphasis on literature as use of language, leaving out of its practices an education of the senses and emotions, as well as the development of language curiosity through experimentation. As literary experience, it fails to mediate the encounter with wider political issues. The other paradigm met, which aims to represent society in its various forms, in practice fails to genuinely represent the socio-cultural values of the majority of students.

The second handicap mentioned by Exton indicates an apparently methodological approach, isolating criticism from creation, practice from theory, but which is intrinsically connected to the social, cultural and political hierarchy of the education system. Rosenblatt believes that literature could help prepare students to meet unprecedented and unpredictable problems, in our turbulent times. She writes that to understand themselves and others, to achieve a philosophy through which to view society, and to influence social development, students must

<sup>8</sup> Mark Jancovich, 'David Morley, *The Nationwide Studies*' (1992) in Barker & Beezer (eds.) *Reading into Cultural Studies*, p 141. To Jancovich, 'the subject is always situated within these processes and conflicts, and is necessarily involved within them'; the aim of his proposal is 'to examine the process of cultural differentiation - the process by which cultural differences are produced - and the forms of domination and control which are involved within it.' (p 142)

<sup>9</sup> B Bernstein (1977) op cit., vol. 3 - pp 69, 81

<sup>10</sup> 'An exercise in democratic learning permitted by social science in the sense of an examination of a range of alternative ideas, policies and structures which opens pupils' minds and allows them to choose for themselves' (Harber, op cit., p 20)



find an answer to the lingering question '*What do the things that we are offered in school and college mean for the life that we are now living or are going to live?*'<sup>11</sup>

What I found missing, in my study of both home-county and inner-city paradigms of literature education, was a critically reflective encounter with a whole range of cultural, ethnic and social issues, of difference of diverse kinds. Literature, it seems, requires a different relationship to its instrument, language; and its problems, besides not always overt, are approachable through the interplay of a wide range of human values. The prescription of 'personal response' to literary texts demanded in A-level exams seems to be based on the trial-and-error internalisation of hidden structures and covert patterns of essay writing, making the concept of 'free writing' seem little authentic, a disguised fallacy, for, as acknowledged by all of the teachers, there are implicit structures and patterns to be learned and reproduced for the exams. It seems contradictory to recommend 'personal response' and creative writing in a Certificate-orientated system, unless it is aimed at separating higher-ability, middle-class pupils from the non-academic ones at post-sixteen education; especially because there are no declared theories supporting those critical practices. There is little evidence that in literature classes imagination is nourished and exercised, and even less that it aims at cultural, social and political awareness. As it is, literature education in England represents an academic selection of the socio-culturally special by birth, or by habitus. There is no visible theory of literary learning which might empower all students.

Culture refers 'to that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life and give *expressive form* to their social and material life-experience'; it is 'the way, the forms, in which groups handle the raw material of their social and material existence'.<sup>12</sup> Gramsci wrote that 'working-class culture cannot be understood without reference to the history of the state and to the history of those institutions which function to maintain and reproduce the social relations of capitalism, in part precisely by seeking to incorporate the working class ideologically and institutionally'.<sup>13</sup> Cultural values are always relative to other

<sup>11</sup> Louise Rosenblatt (1970) *Literature as Exploration*, pp 3-4

<sup>12</sup> Beverley Skeggs, 'Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour*', in Barker & Beezer (1992) op cit., p 185. She quotes from Clarke et al (1976), 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class', in Hall & Jefferson (eds.) *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, London: Hutchinson, p 10

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart 1971.

cultures, and replaced by structures of evaluation: there is a political issue when some values are treated as permanently and inherently less valuable than the values of another, dominant, social or ethnic group.<sup>14</sup>

Gaps, silences and contradictions can be found in theory and practice, in set texts and in classroom methods, in demands and omissions. I agree with Kress that texts occupy a crucial place in any society characterised by multiculturalism, technological change and development, economic factors and transnationalism, but their pedagogical selection and use must attend to the deeper principles of the construction of the curriculum.<sup>15</sup> The emphasis on memorisation, such as found at the home-county school practices, while avoiding creative enquiries and findings, is coherent with the syllabus adopted, constituted of examination papers only, without coursework assessment. On the other hand, the syllabus followed at the Inner-city college, which includes coursework assessment, is expected to promote flexibility of outlook, co-operation and originality through wide reading and individual response, yet making teachers active agents of the evaluation process.

The emphasis on values and unstated rules matches the model of literature as a 'source of refinement, elevation, and humanisation'<sup>16</sup> on its surface. Especially at the home-county school, where the universe seemed to be enclosed in the town's limits, and the concept of nation was defined by the political profile of its suburban population, literature education was presented as an unbiased academic upgrader, a neutralised alternative to language studies well regarded by universities as well as by prospective employers. What seemed to happen in the deeper layers, in fact, was a disguised realisation of high, polished ideals, visible in the banking pedagogy supported by memorisation, annotation and mechanical response to examinations.

### ***Conflict and Interaction as Strategies***

Dixon acknowledges that theoretical thinking as the discussion of alternative category systems is rarely found, even in the most selective sixth forms, where no theoretical justification is available<sup>17</sup>. In practice, reading and writing are

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<sup>14</sup> Kress (1995), op cit., pp 58-9

<sup>15</sup> Kress (1995) op cit., p.62

<sup>16</sup> Collins, in J Miller (ed.), p. 257

<sup>17</sup> 1991, p. 165. According to Dixon, while in the 1960s universities and schools had no general theory of writing, British students were judged and selected by their writing. Between 1966 and

almost always initiated by the teacher, in a selective and verticalised role, leaving the student to be the passive '*right-answer machine*', while the teacher remains the '*authoritative fault-finder*'<sup>18</sup>. The declared aims of A-level exams, as found in the syllabuses, did not seem to contemplate the ethnic, social and cultural variety among inner-city adolescents of various socio-economic backgrounds, with their subtleties and ideological implications. According to Cosway, the cultural values and customs set in literature are at variance with non-white and with working-class inner-city white pupils, as much as with the black ones<sup>19</sup>. However, the A-level working-class students viewed and interviewed appeared to contradict the disbelief in qualifications described by some authors<sup>20</sup>, struggling along and resisting differences in order to gain access to higher education, without necessarily achieving success.

Fred Inglis puts a contemporary view of the problem surrounding teachers' roles in today's society when he states that

English teachers are caught upon the twistpoint of contemporary British politics. They are structurally impelled by the drivers of society towards its inhuman and ungainsayable goals: production, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, profitability, consumption - the technical imperatives. At the same time, they have tried to keep faith with another, better tale of the good personal life, and even the good and public society. For the sake of making daily life in schools bearable, they have to enforce the principles of order of schools, in classroom, corridor and refectory, the implacable bureaucratizing and production of work, greatest of the symbols of the labour culture, and the allocation of the educable and the ineducable to the right rooms. Nobody could suppose that these are either rational or admirable ways to treat our children. Learning to labour, and not to labour but to draw the dole in a quiet, obliging way, is a hell of a business. Making sure that it happens turns teachers in an important part of themselves into monsters.<sup>21</sup>

Teachers at the school and at the college complained about the amount of paperwork they were expected to do, which took time away from their teaching

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1970 the problem was tackled by the London Writing Research Group and the Birmingham CCCS, working to develop models of written communication appropriate to their domain of interest, towards more independent and active students, to make writing a flexible resource for thinking and learning, and escaping from restricted traditions in writing (pp 162-3).

<sup>18</sup> Dixon, *ibid.*, p.163

<sup>19</sup> Paul Cosway - 'A Plea for a Multi-Ethnic Approach to A level English' *English in Education*, vol. 21, 1987. In this article, Cosway reports his classroom experiment with black poems in multi-ethnic groups.

<sup>20</sup> B. Skeggs, in analysing Willis' *Learning to Labour*, writes that 'Willis demonstrated that the working class is the only class in the capitalist social formation which does not have a structurally-based vested interest in mystifying itself', adding that those pupils 'just do not believe that qualifications have any value'. Skeggs also quotes from Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* that 'certificates obscure the meaningless nature of work', leading to social exclusion from their own culture and friends. *Op cit.*, p 189

<sup>21</sup> F. Inglis, 'The Condition of English in England' in *English in Education* vol. 21, 1987 (pp 10-20)

work, but was given priority, as part of the efficiency-profitability-production strategy. Such bureaucratic imposition appeared to impose on teachers a concern for financial pressures inside and outside schools, so that they were also made responsible for resource drawing, through the achievement of good examination results. English departments have gradually achieved more power within the structure of schools because, according to Protherough, English (language and literature) has provided many candidates, and consequently, more groups to be taught, requiring more English specialists, and consequently, more resources can be argued for.<sup>22</sup> Inside classrooms, in the name of pragmatism, time regulates a great many classroom strategies, and is often used to justify gaps and contradictions: current issues were not allowed to emerge, according to some teachers interviewed, so as to avoid time waste, a concept at social control's service.

Concern with the final product, and the real pressure related to it, has overshadowed interest in the process of teaching and learning literature. Aims, as stated by teachers, have actually been centred on passing the exams.

One of the areas of conflict that appeared through the interviews was the organisation of contents, which in the English system is the reading, analysis, and written interpretation of set texts. More socio-cultural than conceptual, it represents the set of values which have been established as the utmost expression of Englishness. As such, the knowledge produced by the combination of such literary texts was found in accordance with the home-county community, and its embodiment of 'fundamentally' English characteristics (in race, social class, political tendency, social rules of behaviour, leisure, propagated views, beliefs, and values). For instance, the only white, male, middle-class voice that raised against Shakespeare was Chris', who considered himself a social misfit at Hollybush, and who struggled to '*squeeze some meaning from so many words*'. David, respected, admired, awarded the 'prefect' badge, a high-flyer at Hollybush, declared his deep love for Shakespeare exactly for the 'flowery language', evidence of the connection between his discriminating competence and the principles of literary-pedagogical achievement through high critical standards. If the cognitive and the affective are bound together in literary studies, and if the reader's response to the

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Protherough (1986) *Teaching Literature for Examinations*, p 7

text is an essential element, because 'literary values derive from the whole of life, as stated by Protherough<sup>23</sup>, David's chances of literary success had already been determined, acknowledged, and respected. His discontent came not from the subject, but from the non-selectivity, undemanding practices, and the teacher (Sue)'s insufficient literariness. Ultimately, David, whose interaction with the discipline's values was profound, passed his test of taste with the highest mark (A), while Chris failed the literature exams. Also at the Inner-city college, despite more dynamic teaching strategies and students' higher level of interest and participation, results were below average, disappointing teachers and students alike.

Waller described political processes as based upon conflict, which results in accommodation, whereas cultural processes are characterised by the interpenetration of persons and groups, and result in 'the sharing of experience and history'. As a social institution, school is then a cultural microcosm mirroring the political macrocosm.<sup>24</sup> Waller wrote that, 'to a degree, the explanation of the contradictions of the school is to be found in the conflicts that rage about it', specially when schools are trying to amalgamate different cultures into one whole culture.<sup>25</sup> The inner-city situation was an example of conflicting contradiction founded on non-accommodated cultural differences. A multicultural, multi-ethnic student body, who did not share experience nor history, had chosen literature education led by the affective terms of course aims, such as 'enjoyment' and 'appreciation', without the previous knowledge that only specific, formal - even if non-explicit - objectives were to be assessed (to acquire knowledge, to understand, to recognise and communicate), and that *personal response* was an ambiguous phrase meaning culturally and socially legitimated concepts. The conflict between stated aims and objectives, descriptively associated with pleasure, and the ultimate skill-searching goals indicated an intrinsic contradiction, since reading pleasure was compromised during sixth-form, becoming a crucial point of tension.

In Waller's opinion, 'education brings one into touch with the main stream of culture', which is 'indissolubly connected with having a different place in society' (p 21). He wrote that when schools separate individuals into classes which

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Protherough (1986) *Teaching Literature for Examinations*, p 4

<sup>24</sup> Willard Waller (1967) *The Sociology of Teaching*, p 15. He describes Park & Burgess' assimilation and accommodation distinction.

<sup>25</sup> W. Waller (1967) op cit., pp 17-18

somehow represent certain occupational and social strata, it is being 'democratic', but not egalitarian: 'egalitarianism is not essential for democracy', whereas competition is, said Waller. 'A democracy is not a society without classes, but a society of open classes'. Considering the inequalities between cultures, nations, and societies, Waller concluded that 'no modern society is completely democratic' (p 22) and schools reflect that in their classrooms.

Pennie's students seemed to be, first of all, inadequate to the literary environment created in her classroom. At first, I believed that this issue was unnoticed by her as a teacher, and by the minority of middle-class students in her class. However, her ostensibly politics-centred habitus seemed to contradict her denial of a political role in literature education, as well as her apparent blindness to socio-cultural differences. When I asked her what her students thought of her, she refused to answer, saying '*you should ask them*'. Inadequacy seems to come less from the socio-cultural 'differences' than from the immobilisation represented by the barred access to the sort of knowledge and literary information the middle-class group shares, which is treated, among middle-class peers, as seminal to the successful treatment of literary matters.

Conceptual priorities are confirmed by classroom approaches which reinforce hierarchy and the perception of values, as some students in Pennie's class well described:

G2:... because I could write a letter saying how rubbish I thought the book was, but chances are very much that my teacher wouldn't like it....

B: ... I don't think anybody really wants to hear what we have to say...

G1:...it's not about criticising really, but appreciating...

B: Yes, appreciation.

Thus, students are kept at a distance either by the set of values imbued in the literary text, or by the strategy of dependence and ambiguity of aims, or by both. In spite of the claim for students' independence, the methods seen used in literature education in practice offered little foundation for free thinking and creative writing, with note-taking and 'spidergram' essay-planning.

Bogdan writes that one of the paradoxes of decentred teaching, which is the difficulty to divest oneself of one's authority, is already established by the heuristic one'd set up at the beginning<sup>26</sup>; it implies that to accept and stimulate a

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<sup>26</sup> D. Bogdan (1993) 'When is a Singing...', op cit., p 7

'poetics of refusal' requires a deep examination of one's internal and external politics, which will involve a re-elaboration of teaching pedagogical principles, with ramifications for literary representations and socio-political commitments. It cannot be an easy option, as it requires that the teacher should be the one who learns, the one who teaches nothing other than the way s/he learns. As mediator of learning, as Freire would say, decentred teaching requires that the teacher becomes interminably a student, interminably learning. Bogdan calls it 'a pedagogy of the unknowable', and explains that it does not disclaim knowledge: 'within this context, students' resistance to knowing is perhaps one of the best teaching tools we have'<sup>27</sup>. However, 'participatory teaching methods play a necessary but not sufficient role in educating for democracy', as they can be used for social control as well as 'to create critical, autonomous and democratic citizens. What is learned and why can be as important as how'<sup>28</sup>.

In the case of literature education in England, it is clear that state-certificated proficiency in literary studies implies complying with a set of rules and writing attitudes endorsed by the higher socio-economic layers. It requires writing about literature in a specialised and difficult form, according to Protherough, because it demands 'the simultaneous use of different language modes and the adoption of different roles by the writer' (p 46); as recognised by teacher Rose, it is a course in writing, and literary reading is used only as stimulation. Students are expected to behave as creative critics, 'developing their own voices and using writing to help them to discover what they think about the text under discussion' (Protherough, 47). How they are trained to achieve that remains a mysterious task, a combination of intuition, teachers' sense of common sense, in-built cultural values, close study of linguistic features in literary texts, and the gradual disclosure of the *pattern* that examiners want. Students are not expected to become independent thinkers, readers, or writers, and this seems to be part of the larger process of social, cultural, and political implicitness of which literature education is part, and given literature's symbolic characteristics, its meta-language.

According to Griffith, the way to counteract the lack of political awareness is to propose a convergent analysis in the teaching of literature, consisting of

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<sup>27</sup> D. Bogdan (1993), op cit., p 11

<sup>28</sup> Clive Harber (1992) op cit., pp 9-10

dealing with the gaps, omissions, silences and contradictions within the text, in social history, and the ones arising through the comparison of the two structures, literary and historical.<sup>29</sup> Harber (p. 13) understands that young people have been socialised towards conservative and inegalitarian values, while literature teachers would be expected to think and act as political animals because of their sphere of action, in spite of the varying level of political awareness at given times of their lives. During interviews, teachers Sue and Pete presented themselves at a safe distance from overtly political issues. However, they cannot be said to refrain from political identification and choices, with their own assenting silence acting by omission, naively helping maintain conservative structures and interests. In fact, it was among teachers and students at the more conservative home-county environment that the belief in the cultural superiority of literature acted as a metaphor of political distance and non-involvement.

To ignore the interrelationship between the socio-political structures of a society and the act of reading and learning is a pedagogy which, according to Macedo, 'gives rise to an ideology of cultural reproduction that produces semiliterates'; to teach the truth and to learn how to question are fundamental assets to the development of critical thinking, 'to arm students against the orchestrated distortion and falsification of reality'.<sup>30</sup>

Macedo believes that the present Anglo model of literature education is founded on the 'overcelebration of myths', with beliefs about the supremacy of Western heritage and the universal culture, whilst demeaning other cultural realities through devaluation mechanisms. Any attempt to change those power relations through democratisation and cultural relativism is considered threatening to institutions settled on dominant ideologies. The maintenance of myths does not depend on evidence of truth: unquestioned, they persist while offering a simplistic view of a complex reality.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Griffith (1987) *Literary Theory and English Teaching*. Milton Keynes: O.U. P., p. 70

<sup>30</sup> Donaldo Macedo (1994) *Literacies of Power*. 'Literacy for Stupidification', pp. 21, 34. Macedo informs that there are sixty million illiterates and functional illiterates in the USA, to which must be added 'the sizeable groups who learn how to read but who are, by and large, incapable of developing independent and critical thought', the reading of both the word and the world. (p 35)

<sup>31</sup> D. Macedo (1994) op cit., p 38. He cites Barbara Flores (1982) PhD dissertation, Univ. of Arizona.



The superiority of literature found its utmost expression, among the practices viewed for this study, in Mr De Mornay's obvious contempt for his upper-sixth class who seemed unable to identify and expand the quotations from Milton's *Paradise Lost* and from the Bible, which he considered basic for students' literary appreciation of 'high' poetry. The amalgamation of hermeneutic interpretation and close reading occupied every space in classrooms where readers/students' presence served the sole purpose of corroborating canonical statements and upper-class ideologies. Not being able to correspond to the teacher's high expectations, those students did not deserve a voice of their own. As the weaker side of the literary-pedagogical transaction, their utter silence in literature classes represented their social passivity, and the absorption of superior values through the teacher's powerful action. At the Inner-city college, the clash between literature's high values and those of students from different cultural backgrounds seemed a confusing and demeaning experience which, Bowers warns, 'may leave them with a diminished competence to communicate about either their own cultural experience or the dominant one that is presented as a powerful and mystifying referent for judging who they are'<sup>32</sup>. They are thus being socialised to what Freire has called a 'culture of silence'.

Described by Sue as a 'ladies' subject', literature seems still to carry a gender stigma; even the minority of male students confided they had been led by the idea that it should not be too difficult a subject, allowing them to read books while preparing for the exams. At the interviews, some said they were having 'second thoughts' about their choice, since things were not as easy as they had expected, with a lot of time-consuming 'thinking and writing' to do. Did they anticipate pleasure and leisure only? Or did they resent the absence of communicative competence in focusing and articulating the issues valued and acknowledged by school?

A 'good reader' in less democratic societies appears to be the one who conforms to the status quo, who aims to pursue the values established as socially relevant and culturally meaningful by the hegemonic classes, and who also denies the presence of political matters into his/her readings, while being led to keep genuinely personal responses and contextual interferences to a minimal level. The

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<sup>32</sup> C.A. Bowers (1984), *op cit.*, p 58

denial of politics may be substituted by aesthetics or morality as one case of reading strategy; therefore, the classification of readers' goodness seems more linked to political than to literary factors. Truly democratic education should teach students about the arguments and the principles underlying curricular proposals, so as to include them as agents in the debates affecting them, but from which they are excluded (Cain, p xx). The inclusion in the debates could motivate students to read, to think, to participate.

The knowledge valued by English literature courses is of an intuitive quality, and generates a powerful subjective impression that students are now equipped to analyse *any* piece of text, no matter its source, a practice which offers a sense of power over the environment, according to Griffith<sup>33</sup>. In my view this is not at all accessible to students in general, and more than ever, from multicultural backgrounds. I agree with Griffith that the use of theory is crucial to the use of literature, and would add that theory, not one divorced from society and culture, may be the most meaningful contribution to the multicultural clientele presently found in urban classrooms.

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<sup>33</sup> P. Griffith (1987) op cit., p 86-87

## **PART THREE: THEORISING THE ISSUES**

The following part comprises two chapters. In Chapter Seven I attempt to argue how literature education metaphorically represents the society it is set upon, with more marked elements than any other subject of study at school. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I return to the set of questions posed at the beginning of this dissertation, and make recommendations in terms of educational contribution towards more equitable societies, in a pedagogy of possibilities for literature education.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: Literature Education as Social Representation

things happen,  
and simply to record them  
is often to deceive,  
is even sometimes to mimic fog,  
the way it's perfectly  
yet inadequately clear about itself.<sup>1</sup>

Literature and literary studies have been centred on the representation of a desired society in which literacy, reading habits and literary knowledge are concentrated on the higher layers of the social pyramid; any attempts to broaden such representation are often greeted with contempt and with the threat of lowering standards, an expression often seen used synonymically with the denial of less valued cultures and societies.

I have been looking at two basic modes of teaching, which, although not necessarily opposed, are symbolic of classroom praxis and address issues of social representations beyond the limits of literature classrooms. Analysis of empirical evidence has helped to determine that there is, on the one hand, a proposal which is explicit, based on large amounts of memorising material, aiming at objectivity through measurable results; and another, which is implicit, with unstated boundaries, aiming at subjectivity through personal assessment modes. The first points to unequal practices shaped as superficial readings of texts and realities, with little emphasis on literature as art and culture, but instead, given the time allocation, as a fast, superficial study of traces, dates and facts situated outside of readers. The second is practised following a reading-writing paradigm with little variation, centred on the canon and on the command of the cultured norm of language usage, and its implicit socio-cultural values. Contents in the first are memorisable, explicit, and control over them comes from textbooks with detailed information. It allows little participation in shaping what is learned, on apparently equal bases among students. Contents in the second are not clearly communicated, are implicit, and choice and control are in the hands of teachers. The corresponding classroom models are: textbook-centred, with a strong social class determiner between schools in the former; and structure-tied, teacher-centred and determined

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Dunn, 'Not the Occult', *Landscape at the End of the Century*

by social class in the latter. Both models emphasise relations and effects of literature which implicitly or explicitly ignore the confrontation of cultures and societies, leaving the political component of literary matters out of pedagogical situations.

Among the issues that were raised through the analysis of the data produced in both countries, two main problems have emerged as pivotal to the understanding of literature education as a social metaphor. The first is the identification of the pedagogy of silences found in the majority of literature classrooms, in both countries. The second is the feasibility of using a theory-founded mode of teaching and learning literature at school, with the aim of achieving pedagogic democracy.

### ***A Pedagogy of Silences***

Barnes wrote that 'it would be misleading to treat curricula as if they were mechanically determined by the institutional structures in which they occur'<sup>2</sup>, since they are also constituted by intentional actions of individuals and specific situations. In this study, although teachers and students of literature in both countries were also able to describe their aims, practices and recognised dilemmas, they did not seem aware of contradictions and constraints between their utterance and their practices, perhaps because, as Barnes also found, the spirit and demand of examinations becomes dominant, pushing to the background other issues of social, cultural and political nature, 'which is not to say that teachers are entirely unaware of it'. However, there were differences between teachers' different levels of perception and awareness of those issues. The purposes, constraints and compromises that create and maintain those practices (Barnes, p 380) represent societies, of which literature education is part, and is structured accordingly.

In this study, I have tried to prove that not only 'personal growth' but also 'basic writing skills', however distinct, are metaphors of closed societies and their implicit rules, which depend on personal development and literary sensibility in a liberal-humanist model. 'Width of reading' and 'knowledge of facts' metaphorically represent societies aiming for open social relations, with methods founded on positivist models. Neither educational system, however, has been found

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<sup>2</sup> Barnes & Barnes (1984) op cit., Ch 9, p 379.

to promote students' responsibility for their own learning, or their autonomy towards self-assessment, self-control or self-growth as individuals and social subjects. It cannot be denied that, to all of those students, the teaching and learning of literature is geared to examinations as a preparation for the future.

Different teachers adopt different strategies, coping with the demands of schools, departments, parents, educational authorities, but do so, according to Barnes, 'in ways shaped by the professional culture into which they have been inducted during education, training and early teaching experience'. They are supported by their working environment and by the culture in which they were raised<sup>3</sup> and alongside their practices different traditions can be perceived. When, as stated by Barnes, reading is believed to be the individual's unique response to a work of literature, and writing the opportunity to generate and explore a unique vision (pp. 387-8), literature has necessarily to play an ethical role. At school, this role implies listening and obedience, and sometimes suspicion and rigor, instead of opening the way to a critique of culture.

Why are students not prepared to exercise a critique of culture? First of all, because they are expected to acquire either literary experience (the implicit model) or literary knowledge (the explicit one). Either way, not only are teachers not prepared to encourage the full range of critical practice in their students (Scholes, p 41), but also there is a clear cause and an even clearer consequence to that. Students are not stimulated towards problematization of literary issues, because they are not given access to the tools that might liberate them as critics, as thinkers, as doers; they do not know the codes upon which textual production depends. I agree with Freire's conviction that every human being, no matter how submerged in the 'culture of silence', is 'capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others', provided the proper tools are available for the gradual perception of personal and social reality and its contradictions.<sup>4</sup>

Literature classrooms lack literary theories, and there is a complicating factor in that teachers themselves do not hold a confident knowledge of those

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<sup>3</sup> Barnes & Barnes (1984), op cit., p 385. They classify classroom cultures as 'commitment-based' (taking a paternalistic view of responsibilities and requiring from pupils a commitment to the school values), such as the home-county school, and 'contract-based', such as the inner-city college (if students do not fulfil their side of the contract they can be quickly expelled) - pp 385-388.

<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (trans. Myra B Ramos) 'Foreword', p 14

theories either: they are not taught/trained to exercise a critique of literature, of cultures, of societies. As Scholes points out, the interpretation of a literary text is not a pure skill, but a discipline deeply dependent on knowledge (p 33). The consequence of this state of things is the most remarkable point common to most students: the *silence* of their doubts, questions, ideas, and dilemmas. Sometimes the silence is more audible, as it was at Hollybush and at Homer School, visible through the eloquence of body language; at other times, it is woven into issues of social class and cultures, and only (later) explicated by those powerfully silenced. In general, teacher-student relationships reveal, according to Freire, a fundamentally narrative character, involving a 'narrating Subject' (the teacher), and 'patient, listening objects' (students). Its consequence is a lifeless, petrified process of 'being narrated to', while education suffers from 'narration sickness'<sup>5</sup>, which in the Brazilian situation appears through the historical contents narratively detached from reality, 'disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance' (Freire, 52).

Textual power embodies the power to select, to shape and present certain aspects of human experience. In my proposal, literature teachers should be able to help students to unlock textual power and turn it to their own uses, to come into their own powers of textualization, as Scholes states (p 20). If literature education represents social relations, such complex dynamics becomes even more responsible for political attitudes, making of literary truth a problem requiring more critical response. Rather than literary historicism or superficial practical criticism, literature represents the aesthetic medium of cultural representation of politically acknowledged powers, to be taught/learned not with reverence, but with an eye of critical awareness. My proposal is that students should be granted access to different construals, to the different roles proposed and/or expected from them as readers and students of literature, and the process of understanding the interrelation of ideology, language and power through different theories should found their literature education.

What practice has shown is that a pedagogy of (multiple) silences is opted for when we, teachers, refuse to demystify canonical knowledges, to clarify relations of domination and gender, race, social class subordination, when we hide

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<sup>5</sup> Freire (1996) op cit., p 52

behind programmes, syllabuses and convenient fears to avoid the unease of emancipatory classrooms where students will be empowered. There are silences when students are smothered with love, 'the benevolent gaze of the teacher who will secure freedom from authority'<sup>6</sup>, which serves to hide deficiencies instead of discussing them. Silences also prevail when teaching is done on behalf of examinations, or when standards are lowered in the name of pseudo-alternative strategies. Or when we, teachers, allow ourselves to fence off a few 'defiant' voices, which we tend not to allow into our classrooms.

Literature students in inner-city environments have been silent/silenced most of the time not just for fear of *against-freedom* authority, but mainly because they feel socially uncomfortable. They have been led to believe that literature is not accessible to them, if they cannot afford to complement textual readings with theatre outings, or the acquisition of weekly literary reviews, widening their literary knowledge through dominating (or being dominated by) the classics, the canon, the Bible, the 'high culture'. I witnessed Pennie's students' discomfort, silenced at the Barbican Theatre while watching *King Lear*, because the regular theatre-goers around them discussed past productions, compared stage scenarios, showing off culture and buying power while sipping white wine. And those students had not been empowered to resist socio-economic intimidation, to value the recognition of their own cultures or to find them literarily represented. Literature education has failed them, as such, because it has not taught them subjectivity, identity and knowledge; it has not empowered them theoretically. Instead, they have been asked to 'upgrade' to where male, white, middle-class values stand, carrying along with them the disenfranchisement, the inadequacy and the silence, while learning to internalise an agenda of erasure of their own cultural values by examining literary texts through 'practical' criticism which in fact teaches them acquiescence.

If the education of working-class and black children in the use of rules and strategies is a problem, because, as Walkerdine writes, they rarely conform to teachers' expectation of ideal students<sup>7</sup>, literature classrooms and their value-laden

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<sup>6</sup> Valerie Walkerdine 'Progressive Pedagogy and Political Struggle' in Luke & Gore (1992) op cit., p 16. On page 18, Walkerdine writes: 'At the very moment that nature was introduced into pedagogy, the shift to covert surveillance became enshrined in a word-'love'. (...) The possession of a womb was thought to render a woman unfit for deep thought... [and] women teachers could provide a quasi-maternal nurturance to compensate for the depraved environments of the poor'.

<sup>7</sup> Walkerdine (1992) op cit., p 21



agenda militate against the power to speak, critique and act in ways commensurate with students' interests. The empowerment of students towards active and critical political participation demands that their experience and voice are valued, through a sense of 'critical agency', a transformative role enabling students to name and give voice to their experiences; and then, 'by critically examining the discourses that give meaning to those experiences'<sup>8</sup>. To provide students with critical analytical tools will enable them to understand the forces that shape their experience, articulating their experiences and sense of self. In the literature classroom it seems only possible through the reflective and critical appropriation of the domain of literary critical theories. Only thus can literature overcome the limiting structures of the present state as a metaphor of hegemonic cultural values and be thought of as a metaphor of social empowerment, by helping students to understand and engage in the world around them, while enabling them to interfere in the social order if necessary. Rather than 'giving' analytical tools to students, teachers must themselves have confident control of those critical tools so that they can mediate students' access to them and facilitate concrete practices. For Freire,

apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.<sup>9</sup>

To call for students' voice, as Orner warns<sup>10</sup>, can be an oppressive construct perpetuating relations of domination, if they operate within specific historical contexts (to talk may signify to reveal or to confess personal information in the presence of authority, which the teacher represents); in that case, silences can be defensive, resisting, participant, and contradictorily more eloquent than loud choruses. The point I am arguing for is the theory and practice of non-'digestive' education<sup>11</sup> which allows authentic voices of social, political and cultural subjectivities to be acknowledged specifically and developed theoretically.

...the concept of voice spans literal, metaphorical and political terrains: In its literal sense voice represents the speech and perspectives of the speaker; metaphorically, voice spans inflection, tone, accent, style and the qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker's

<sup>8</sup> C. Luke 'Feminist Politics in Radical Pedagogy', in Luke & Gore (eds.) (1992), op cit., p 35-6

<sup>9</sup> Freire (1996) op cit., p 53

<sup>10</sup> Mimi Orner 'Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice in "Liberatory" Education...', in Luke & Gore (eds.) (1992), pp 74-6. Orner argues that calls for student voice are made for the control, limit, discipline of the speaker, after the voice is heard.

<sup>11</sup> What Freire calls 'banking education', Sartre called the 'digestive' or 'nutritive' concept of education, with a teacher feeding students knowledge to 'fill them out'. Apud Freire (1996), p 57

words; and politically, a commitment to voice “attests to the *right* of speaking and being represented”.<sup>12</sup>

In order to avoid the imposition of the ‘call for a voice’ in students, literature teachers have to allow in their classrooms tentative, provisional attempts, which correspond not only to the changing relations of power at multiple levels of social life, but also to the multiple positions, voices, pleasures, tensions and contradictions that all subjects present in all historical contexts. Silences also mediate aspects of language and of the unconscious, and allow differences to emerge, with all the interruptions, gaps, confusion and dilemmas that are always part of the pedagogical interplay, and which offer the greatest insight and possibilities for change. What Freire calls the ‘culture of silence’, which is the refusal to talk in the presence of the oppressor as a form of defence or resistance, may disappear in the literature classrooms aiming for a democracy of societies and cultures.

### **Theory, difficulty, and the ‘good reader’**

The syllabuses examined in both countries include among their stated aims in literature education both the development of reading abilities and the acquisition of reading habits formally linked with pleasure. It is commonly believed that, by reading literature, one learns through characters’ experiences and may find solutions to problems otherwise left unsolved. I have not found in curriculum prescriptions or literature syllabuses any indication that a good reader must be concerned with the social, cultural and political issues to be explored in literary texts. Even the historico-biographical approach prescribed in Brazil avoids interdisciplinarity, as it is not constructed around the kind of history that intersects with other histories involving politics, social economics, race relations, gender issues: this would require a curriculum built upon the values of strong democracy and open, informed exchange.<sup>13</sup>

When focusing on the development of reading abilities, most of the students interviewed in both countries stated that studying literature in general was

<sup>12</sup> Mimi Orner, op cit., p. 76. She also refers to D. Britzman (1989) ‘Who Has the Floor? Curriculum, Teaching, and the English Student Teacher’s Struggle for Voice’, in *Curriculum Inquiry*, 19:2, p 146.

<sup>13</sup> W. E. Cain (ed.) (1994) *Teaching the Conflicts:...* ‘Introduction’ (pp. vii, xi) also tackles this point.

driving them away from reading for pleasure, as a chosen form of leisure activity. The College students in England asserted that after having started their A-level course, reading had become much more of a *critical activity* to which they felt generally committed, therefore causing them to engage in reading as a task to be fulfilled; at no time was reading pleasure an issue as part of literary studies. On the other hand, most Brazilian students, feeling pressurised and overburdened by the imposition of factual data to be memorised in addition to the set texts, declared that having to study literature had definitely driven them away from literary reading. Another problem mentioned especially by the students at Homer School, in Brazil, was the fact that literary work at school denied the possibility of overt political engagement, either by limiting the canon to past, 'apolitical' works, or by prescribing quantitative criteria for examination preparation, without acknowledging that this is already a political option.

Even those students whose earlier experience with literary works had been positive prior to commencement of secondary school, in Brazil, found that as they were getting deeper into the set programme of studies, the less appealing they seemed to find reading for self-fulfilment or aesthetic knowledge. By the same token, they were not generally acknowledged as 'good readers' by school because theirs was not the kind of reading validated by the system. Gradually, they were led to believe in it as well, and ended up placing the curriculum as 'the unwinnable prize' (Cain, p *xix*).

In a less implicit manner, the confusing amalgam of historical and biographical information defined by Brazilian teachers as the literary 'theory' does not grant students literary knowledge, critical power, nor a place in the selective gallery of readers of literature, without what Graff calls a return to a historical view of literature which shows students the critical perspective 'from which to assess the richness and poverty of the contemporary' (Cain, p *xxiv*). Literature education in Brazilian schools aims at instilling in students the memorisation of informative data, without affective, psychological, or political-connected reflections with the past or the present. The 'good readers' in Brazilian schools are the ones who are led to ignore the transformative powers of literature, and of education; they escape the attempted choices proposed by pedagogies of critical awareness. And in England, without clear guidance about what to look for in the

text, the practice of 'close reading' invites impressionist searches for beauty and moral gems, therefore stopping students from gathering the enthusiasm required to enter the text and the issues addressed by it.

Very often readers/students reject a text, around which the stigma of difficulty has been created. What does literary difficulty refer to? What determines the 'readability' of a text? According to Kress, one view derives from notions of 'normal language use', and the 'distance of literary language' from that; another from the technical apparatus constructed around texts. 'Difficulty is an aspect of the individual's estimate of the nature of the object and that individual's estimate of her or his capacity to deal with the object'.<sup>14</sup> In classroom terms, difficulty is what is to be tested and how, and examiners rank students on a scale rating their performance, seeking certainty and definitiveness of answers. But undoubtedly, there is a commercial and political value in classifying one piece of writing as more readable than another, making readability 'a highly complex, many-sided topic whose fuller understanding requires insights from many disciplines, perhaps even research techniques that are still not well developed'<sup>15</sup>.

A number of textual points must be taken into account when considering a text's readability, including differences of language and culture, new information, values, and references made by the author. A clear example of this was seen in many of the literature lessons viewed in both countries, with texts analysed by the teachers with students' minimal participation and, especially in English schools, biblical and classical references made more important than the text itself. Not provided with the sources of reference, students become more and more dependent on the teachers' expertise and *translation*. The average student cannot deal with literature independently, as she/he is led to think that allusion hunting is within the sole competence of teachers and therefore beyond her/his apprehension and comprehension. Bowers suggests that 'incorporating a cross-cultural perspective into the curriculum unit helps to overcome the difficulty of recognising the conceptual categories and assumptions' at the basis of students' beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Alan C. Purves (ed.) (1991) *The Idea of Difficulty in Literature*. 'Introduction', p. 1

<sup>15</sup> Wallace Chafe, 'Sources of Difficulty in the Processing of Written Language', in Purves (ed.) (1991), op cit., pp 8-9

<sup>16</sup> C.A. Bowers (1984) op cit., p 93

When in classrooms literature is studied through the strategy of 'fishing out' the writer's meaning in order for the interpretative process to take place, or alternatively the text is presented as a self-contained, contextless artefact<sup>17</sup>, difficulties appear as insurmountable, beyond students' limited capacities of inference, or intuition. In the face of a text characterised by ambiguity, and difficulty, 'a range of interpretations [should] be offered to make accessible the seemingly inaccessible' (Birch, p. 23).

Corcoran<sup>18</sup> explains that *accommodation*, as proposed by Eco, implies the reader's unchallenging acceptance of the requirements of discursive conventions; *opposition*, proposed by Giroux to substitute for accommodation, involves a refusal to learn patterns and conventions of a particular discourse community, while *resistance*, to Giroux, posits the 'possibility and necessity of the reader's rejection of the text's attempts at ideological entrapment' (pp 55-6). Such a range of interpretations was never mentioned, discussed, or put into use in any of the literature classrooms viewed in either country, and it is this capital lack of theoretical formation that constitutes the central dilemma in the modes of literature education found. As already quoted, students at the home-county school in England believed that 'the work we do is very, very difficult' (Pete's group), and the teacher's presence guaranteed the translation of difficulties into easier annotations which they could regurgitate at the examinations.

Adams believes that the concept of literary difficulty arose from the establishment of religious mystery in a holy text to be guarded and regulated by a special class, as well as from the defence of works of fiction against their identification with untruth: 'the text hid beneath its *literal* surface a valuable

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<sup>17</sup> David Birch, *Language, Literature and Critical Practice*, p 21

<sup>18</sup> Bill Corcoran (1992), 'Reader Stance:...', in Many and Cox (eds.), proposes six construals of text and of reader roles, which take account of 'the shaping forces of history, culture, and ideology'. The first, the Arnoldian or Leavisite portrayal of canonical texts, places the reader in the role of 'respectful, deferential, and receptive acolyte', and the text as 'hegemonic artefact'; second, the New Critical focus on 'the words on the page', requires a self-effacing reader in the role of 'linguistic problem solver', and the text as artistic object; the third construal treats the text as 'subjective stimulus' and the reader as 'unique responder', based on subjective or psychoanalytic versions of reader-response theory; the fourth sees the text as 'aesthetic blueprint', and the reader as 'transactional partner', operating 'not on the real world, but on its patterned representation'. The fifth is 'the text as *readerly/writerly* or *closed/open* document, implying the reader as model reader or rewriter (based on Barthes' structuralist account and Eco's semiotic pairing), with the reader as a relatively passive consumer of texts, 'at the mercy of cultural codes and literary conventions'; and the sixth construal treats the text as 'discursive formation' and the reader as 'textual subject', as sites of disunity and conflict, as stated by structuralists. (p 50-55).

teaching, often rescuing a surface that was politically or morally suspect'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, textual difficulty or obscurity consisted of a positive virtue, just like reading poetry has generally been associated with difficulty: 'you should not expect the reading of poetry to be easy; if you want to get all you can from it, you should be prepared to think hard when occasion demands', as poetry 'is the product of an acute and sensitive mind'.<sup>20</sup> Poetry reading is still believed to require *intelligent thought about the nature of thought*, for real literature is the product of disciplined minds'<sup>21</sup>; failure to recognise the elements demonstrated indicates, therefore, lack of sensitivity, or of intelligence of thought.

Not uncommonly the school system fails students for lack of the language to express their intuitive grasp, or of the theories to deepen and enlarge problems and concepts. Since according to one college teacher, Rose, 'reading is just an excuse for students' writing practice', without any form of theoretical support other than drafting and re-drafting, the system relies on the sort of osmosis, 'intuitive' knowledge or capacity based on standards usually associated with the middle classes; in capitalist societies, reading and writing, though simple and fundamental activities, are 'forms of regulation and exploitation *and* potential modes of resistance, celebration and solidarity'<sup>22</sup>.

Intrinsic criticism rests on some assumptions associated with difficulty: the special texts which qualify as literature have specific literary values and qualities, written by specially sensitive people - the 'complex and opaque' expression of individual experiences, according to Birch, with a distinctive, non-ordinary aura; their meaning is located within the text itself, as an invariable 'self-contained system' which is to be determined by the privileged critic, 'a sort of literary archaeologist'. As such, students and readers have no access to the 'cultural and ideological values of the systems and theories "behind" the readings'.<sup>23</sup>

Academic opportunities still remain linked to socio-economic levels of appreciation and knowledge, and to adopt a laissez-faire attitude in literature

<sup>19</sup> Hazard Adams, 'The Difficulty of Difficulty', in Purves (ed.) (1991), op cit., pp 23-4

<sup>20</sup> David Birch, op cit., p 62, quoting James Reeves (1956) *The Critical Sense, Practical Criticism of Prose and Poetry*, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> F.R. Leavis (1975) *The Living Principle. 'English' as a Discipline of Thought*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 13

<sup>22</sup> J. Batsleer, T. Davies et al. (1985) *Rewriting English... 'Culture and Politics'*, p 5.

<sup>23</sup> David Birch, op cit., p 86

classes peopled also by the working classes corresponds to limiting their chances to participate in the competition for higher education. Thus, the stigma of difficulty surrounding literature as a subject of study is a matter of whether or not to theorise the curriculum, rather than limiting the access of school students to literary works of art. While in England only the Inner-city college students - who had endured the socio-political problems of class differences, allied to various sorts of social-cultural and politico-economic prejudice - showed socio-political concern with class and cultural differences, among the Brazilian students interviewed it was the ones from Homer School who showed a clearer perception of differences. It was revealing to hear a student praise a teacher of literature who was good because he had made matters simple and accessible, and had *talked to us*. It seems that difficulty becomes an élitist pursuit through strategies of power which deny simplicity. However, simplicity - to Kress 'a highly ideological construct' - cannot be confused with lack of thinking complexity, for to demand that less privileged students have only access to forms of knowledge which are simple, easy and of immediate practical use can be politically pernicious to a country and a culture, if issues and problems are reduced to the lowest common denominator.<sup>24</sup> It is in the name of abolishing difficulty that there have been suggestions that literature should be eliminated from the school curriculum, and students' time would be better employed reading other textual materials than literary works.<sup>25</sup>

Literature is as difficult as any other subject of study, and requires its own methods, approaches, strategies, and fundamental theories. Without instruments for thought, reflection, exchange and political engagement, literature will remain a difficult, selective, unpleasant and unpopular obligation (in Brazil), or a wrong choice (in England). Political causes are built on a logic cause-and-effect relation. Therefore, to question the idea of literary difficulty demands questioning the status quo, the forces seeking its uprooting, while still demanding questioning certainties. In order to make something out of students' comments about the difficulty of dealing with literary texts, it is necessary to specify which instruments have been offered to them other than the teacher her/himself as the only source of knowledge and definitive answers, in England, or as textbook translator of historical truths, in

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<sup>24</sup> Helen Regueiro Elam, 'The Difficulty of Reading', in Purves (1991), op cit., p. 74

<sup>25</sup> As narrated by T. Gillespie 'Why Literature Matters', quoted in Chapter One of this dissertation.

Brazil. At present, literature is difficult because there is no other way of tackling difficulties than relying on what teachers say. Without a theory of literature education, students will remain the dependent objects Davies writes about, 'placed intransitively at the opposite pole to the scholarly professionalism of their teachers.'<sup>26</sup> Difficulty translates visually as boredom, passivity, unpleasant methods, and lack of interactive communication. Literary difficulty, as such, strongly represents social and cultural practices of exclusion found at school.

### ***A pedagogical democracy of social cultures***

There is a fundamental contradiction at the base of the discipline, literature education, for whereas issues of teaching and learning have been potentially responsible for many of the tensions surrounding the discussion of modes of dominance and subordination, literature has rarely been identified with issues of social struggle and cultural identification yet. This is visible, as already pointed out, in the fact that in Brazil, where literature is a compulsory pre-university subject, it is offered as a stratified discipline founded on historical knowledge and/or language prescriptions, whereas in England, as an elective subject, it is presented as a personalised milieu of subjective social and cultural values. Both processes aim at reproductive pedagogies, and circumscribe literature teaching and learning to a superficial discourse which limits the subjects' capacity to act upon the world.

Secondly, as there is no innocent discourse of pedagogical strategies, this is a proposal committed with a critical pedagogy asserting cultural differences and their associated power relations, centred on the evidence found in literature classrooms, where issues of difficulty, boredom, silence have been settled in close association with questions of political democracy of the social cultures those students represent, alongside issues of socio-cultural class, gender, ethnicity and politico-economic power. Thus, studying literature for the A-level exams implies not only the omission of those issues but also an upgrading of literary tastes and a 'broadening' of cultural contexts through the acquisition of higher values, so that passing the examinations represents having become a 'rounded' person, the discipline's utmost goal. Similarly, passing the literature exams in the *vestibular*

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<sup>26</sup> Tony Davies, 'Damning the Tides: The New English and the Reviewers', in Essays and Studies 1987 - English and Cultural Studies: Broadening the Context. M. Green (ed.) & R. Hoggart, p. 91



situation implies a combination of good memory skills and a disposition towards canonical, 'higher' literature. Neither case corresponds to developing an understanding of cross-cultural nationness, or the development of ampler literary sensibilities.

A pedagogy aiming for socio-cultural democracy should begin by listening to classroom voices. While teachers in Brazil struggle along an endless programme to be squeezed into a rather reduced time allocation, and would prefer to deal with literary emotional and sensorial readings, their students would rather concentrate on texts dealing with recent socio-political changes in the country, although at the same time feeling that the knowledge of factual information allows a more objective and emancipating agenda for the examinations. Although apparently easier, the idea of the English personal-response paradigm was rejected in Brazil by both teachers and students, who judged it 'difficult' and shapeless, therefore prone to teacher-centred authoritarianism. The same teachers and students considered the historical approach not to be prejudicial, provided that it concentrates on recent facts and contemporary history, interwoven with literary representations.

On the other side of the world, English voices claimed for interaction; united by the stigma of difficulty and boredom, both the white, middle-class clientele at the prosperous home county and the non-white, predominantly working-class clientele at the Inner-city college talked about their wish to be seen and heard, despite the fact that the former are the aimed-at target of literary representations. Neither group in England declared themselves to feel empowered, represented, or addressed by the hegemonic curriculum, although the level of complexity of those issues appears more strongly and visibly amidst the college clientele.

Cultural democracy, it has been argued by some critics, lies on the refusal to acknowledge the ideological superiority of literary values. Kress, for example, proposes the simultaneous use of literary, mundane and aesthetically salient texts in classrooms, to be looked at and treated with equal respect and rigour. In my view, this might aid classroom practices to remain socio-culturally dichotomic, and literary artefacts to be avoided for some students, in the name of difficulty, boredom and relevance, because the knowledge of critical theories will remain the domain of a few specialists and theoreticians, and 'taste', as explained by Scholes,

will remain a carefully inculcated norm established by a powerful social class (p. 24), limited by the prior acquisition of generic norms and social patterns.

Cultural democracy can only be achieved inside literature classrooms for all social classes, ethnicities, cultures, through the access to the knowledge and use of different critical theories, not as synthetic recipes, but as valid tools to empower students and make them acquire and develop self-confidence in the treatment of literary texts, which only thus can be desecrated, accessible to all, allowing students into the dialogue, explaining failures, and developing perspectives for founding successful textual and contextual readings, and above all, representing for literature students at school the possibility of creating theoretical knowledge, if they so wish.

### **Pragmatism as a narrow social practice**

Giroux (1994) writes that teachers and academics in education have often viewed theory as an unnecessary intrusion, not unusually confused with methods. Theory has been found too dangerous in education, where its borders might become more difficult to be policed. On the other hand, the association of education with vocation has resulted in its being disregarded as a field for serious theoretical work. To recognise pedagogical competence within politics of knowledge, power, collective agency, and social struggle changes and enlarges education, for literary theory is part of academic debates around the reconstruction and activation of what Giroux has called 'critical public cultures' (1994, p. 110).

Literary theory cannot remain an unproblematic academic field detached from social realities, devoted to narrow traditions settled on white, patriarchal values. Literature education is the site *par excellence* of post-structuralist, feminist, post-modernist, post-colonialist discourse and theoretical construction for the emerging societies of the nineties.

Challenging existing disciplinary boundaries, rejecting the authorizing voice of the canon, and decentering traditional views of the subject and human agency, literary theory has burst upon the academic and popular scene with a vengeance.<sup>27</sup>

Classroom empowerment demands a practice which is unified above academic rejection of symbolic discourses, seeking not only liberal-seeming processes of representation, textual authority, identity construction, but also

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Giroux (1994) *Disturbing Pleasures*. New York: Routledge, p 110

addressing political and material concerns, in what Giroux calls 'the intersection between literary theory and critical pedagogy' (94, p 111).

By critical pedagogy I mean classroom practices based upon theoretical discussion of problematization and cross-cultural consciousness-raising, with special focus on issues of cultural and social diversity. Practice founded on problematized theoretical thinking is a different issue from pedagogical pragmatism resting on uncritical, irresponsible trial-and-error attempts to deliver socially acceptable responses, as in England, or uncritically strolling along memory lane, as in Brazil. Non-oppressive classroom practices of literary studies can only exist with the insertion of political thinking into its syllabuses, methodology and goals, requiring a revision of writers and texts, a re-thinking of democratic approaches, an evaluation of the silences filling present multicultural literature classes. It can not be limited to individual practices performed by pedagogical heroes, a few individuals viewed as more competent, more committed, or prone to risk-taking action.

Although agreeing with Giroux that literary studies should be addressed as a 'contested site of historical, aesthetic, and sociological categories' (p 112) transcending a canonical body of knowledge, I insist that literary texts should remain the basis of literary studies, demystifying the aura of difficulty, inaccessibility, and selectivity, while providing literature studies with theoretical elements which will empower students as readers, critics, and writers, if so wished. Theoretical knowledge, in my view, must be central to the pedagogical-literary *transreading* I am proposing in this thesis, the background of which must always be political, social and cultural; it must become an integral part of literary work for teachers and for students; it can make literature education become a concrete practice with visible outcomes, instead of the blurred, ideology-centred 'elevated' subject presently found in classrooms, reinforcing teacher and students' roles as agents of their own learning, self and social transformation. Theoretical knowledge must leave the academic ivory towers and mediate literary education in all possible directions, fulfilling its role in the understanding of discourse power and social authority. Theory on its own is important not only as pedagogical foundation, but also as political practice.

... if educators make a distinction between teaching theory as a body of knowledge that informs students' understanding of the world and the practice of theorizing as a

pedagogical activity in which students actually participate, it becomes possible to assert the mutual importance of both practices without one erasing or cancelling out the other.<sup>28</sup>

Only by refusing to undertake accepted beliefs as their own, toward a search for alternative modes of thinking and action, will students learn to develop their awareness of perceptions, beliefs, values and politico-pedagogical ideologies in the studying of literature. Only thus can students go beyond set theoretical concepts towards the competence of engaging in inquiries about theories themselves. The aim of this exercise, through interrogating literary and social texts, according to Giroux, is to incite critical insubordination, allowing social, cultural and individual differences to emerge, while also providing 'a space of the possible in which intellectual responsibility is summoned in order to continually clarify questions of consciousness, desire, self, and social identity' (1994, p 117).

Possible ways of interweaving literary theory and critical pedagogy towards the emancipation of students/readers as social subjects point to enhancing the visibility of the relationship between authority, power and knowledge, both in the classroom as the starting realm for interrogating social and political practices, and in ampler social interactions<sup>29</sup>. The central point, in my view, is the critical problematization of relations between teacher and students, between students themselves, between students and texts, in a context of social multiculturalism. Reading and writing literature, more than a critical pedagogy of representation, can mediate the knowledge of larger culture in political, ideological, and historical terms.

### **'Literary evaluation' as social evaluation**

Teachers were asked 'how they usually plan their lessons' and 'what their main professional difficulties are', whereas students were asked 'how they would teach literature if they were to'. These questions intended to clarify aims and practices as found and as intended to be, since evaluation cannot be dissociated from the planning of aims, methods and strategies. Moreover, planning as a teaching stage helps identify the sort of education aimed for. According to Freire,

<sup>28</sup> Giroux (1994), op cit., pp 116-7

<sup>29</sup> This is called by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh ('Theory as resistance' in Kecht *Pedagogy is Politics*) a 'pedagogy of ennoblement' - quoted by Giroux (1994), op cit., p 119. Zavarzadeh also uses the phrase 'theory of intelligibility', 'an inquiry into the grids of social intelligibilities produced by the discursive activities of a culture' - apud Giroux, p 120

in the banking concept both stages (the cognition of a cognizable object by the teacher, and the exposition to students about that object) are the property of the teacher only, in the name of 'preservation of culture and knowledge'. The opposed problem-posing method does not separate between 'cognitive' and 'narrative' activities, as teaching is always 'cognitive', and cognizable objects are not the teacher's private property; students are critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (Freire, 1996, pp 61-2).

Although some of the English teachers considered the amount of paperwork as one of the main difficulties, taking time away from their reading, all of them indicated students' lack of commitment and/or students' limited literary experience as a serious problem. In Brazil, apart from the permanent lack of resources which have afflicted all working at State schools, some resented having to teach 'third-world' students, a metaphor for working-class South Americans with reduced reading experience, as opposed to an ideal clientele of white middle-class first-world literature students with a broader literary experience. Such socio-political evaluation reiterates the presence of a deep-settled low social self-esteem commonly found in colonised countries, for whom imported culture has better quality and higher value. Instead of questioning their own teaching methods, literary competence, and political commitment, having their real-life students as subjects of learning, it becomes part of a wider and complex problem for teachers to point to geographical, climatic and cultural 'deficiencies' when evaluating students' failures in the educational system. Formed to deal with classes peopled with the 'ideal' (white, middle-class, successful) clientele through inadequate, imported critiques, teachers sometimes feel deceived by reality and work towards self-fulfilled prophecies of failure and incompetence, by denying the need to prepare teaching materials aiming at relevant knowledge co-construction, the need to read, to expand their own horizons, to engage in pedagogical problematization, and to fight for theorized, problematized curricular implementation. Rather than identifying with their working-class state-school students, many teachers in fact would rather work only with the emerging middle-class clientele found in fee-paying schools.

Some of the teachers interviewed felt that daily planning was necessary for their control of activities, sometimes in very accurate fashion, in order 'not to be

caught by students without knowing something' (Pete, in England); others were more used to dealing with literary-pedagogical issues intuitively, without specific preparation, although Spivak writes that 'teaching is a question of strategy. That is perhaps the only place where we actually get any experience in strategy, although we talk a lot about it'.<sup>30</sup> Pedagogy has been defined as 'the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies - the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce'<sup>31</sup>. In such view, pedagogy denies

the teacher as neutral transmitter, the student as passive, and knowledge as immutable material to impart. Instead, the concept of pedagogy focuses attention on the conditions and means through which knowledge is produced. All pedagogies are situated - specific and contingent to the cultural fields within which they operate.<sup>32</sup>

The kind of literary evaluation consistent with the pedagogy of individual and social transformation, then, must be the coherent extension of prescribed aims and methods towards the implementation of objective goals. If literature at school is assessed through testing the comprehension of set texts or by training students to sew together the notes dictated by teachers in class, literary response is far from becoming literary responsibility, and the circle will be complete in the enforcement of a literature curriculum growing out of literary history, or close reading, rather than literary experience and meaning.<sup>33</sup>

Although literary texts draw upon readers' prior knowledge of the word, the world and of themselves, literary evaluation as found in most societies does not expect students to approach literature through varied personal and socio-cultural readings, mainly because there is no curricular provision to tackle cultural diversity and theoretical formative gaps among professionals. The spectrum of literary evaluation as found in both countries, thus, symbolises the denial of students' own prior knowledge, their cultural contribution to literature education, and the denial of pleasure and critical participation in a pedagogy of silence and control.

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<sup>30</sup> Gayatri Spivak (1989) In a word. Interview, *Differences*, 1 - pp 124-156, cited by Patti Lather 'Post-Critical Pedagogies: A Feminist Reading', in Luke & Gore (1992), op cit., p 120

<sup>31</sup> David Lusted (1986) 'Why pedagogy?' *Screen*, 27 (5), 2-14, apud P. Lather, in Luke & Gore, op cit., p 121

<sup>32</sup> Patti Lather 'Post-Critical Pedagogies: A Feminist Reading' in Luke & Gore (1992) op cit., p 121

<sup>33</sup> Robert E Probst (1988) 'Readers and Literary Texts' in Ben F Nelms (ed.) *Literature in the Classroom: Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, p 27. Probst presents six categories on which to found the literary experience: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, knowledge of texts, knowledge of contexts, knowledge of processes (of making meaning), and pleasure.

Ultimately, succeeding in personal-response modes takes 'knowing what the teacher wants' and delivering it<sup>34</sup>, in a process of learning what to say about literature in the appropriate form, whereas writing has been long used to test students' understanding, instead of providing them with a means of achieving understanding.

Bernstein<sup>35</sup> asserts that overt pedagogy allows the existence of an *objective* grid for the clear evaluation of the pupils. Invisible pedagogies do not allow such grid to exist, and as a result evaluation procedures are multiple, diffuse and difficult to measure with precision. This 'paradoxically carries a potential for increasing competitiveness'. Consequently, isolated teaching efforts to perform meaningful pedagogies may not interfere with relations of inequality and dominance in a seemingly immutable system, reinforcing what students identify as evaluative difficulty. While the English mode of literature teaching and learning rests on the personal-response paradigm with texts used as an excuse for writing training, without any clear theory or pedagogy of teaching-learning, the overt Brazilian mode misuses theory for historical information, which is privileged over the reading of literary texts, a paradigm which totally ignores the reader's contribution in the transaction. The systems found in both societies, as such, rely on the profile of the discipline as a difficult one for the maintenance of its high-class stance which aids to the selectivity of schooling. At the same time, neither mode values everyday construction and meaning as 'multiple, complex, open and changing co-constructions' (Lather, p 123). Some practices can be considered more effective than others, when it comes to thinking about literature classrooms aiming at the

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<sup>34</sup> James D Marshall (1988) 'Classroom Discourse and Literary Response' in Nelms (ed.) op cit., p 50, quotes, among others, a successful student of literature: 'The first thing I do is I just write an outline of what I'm going to do. I pick a subject and then I write an outline and it's always the same. For a five-paragraph essay the first thing I do is write down Roman numeral I and I write "intro" and then I pick a, b, c, which will give me my three middle paragraphs[...] it works better if you actually write a rough draft of your first paragraph, cause your thoughts are changing and it looks terrible if you scratch out. And the rest of it just kind of comes. The conclusion, you just restate the thesis.' Another student says: 'This is always very technical. Automatic. The first sentence is always "In blank's novel or biographical sketch" and then there's the title. And then you have an example for one character and then an example for another and then you compare the two people and then you conclude - and that's it. It's totally set.' (p 51). A third student says: 'In English class they always give you that line about how they're preparing you for college. Whenever you ask teachers why you're doing what you're doing, that's the definitive answer, that we're preparing you for something [...]. You're not allowed to read it for pleasure. You have to think about the symbols. What does the fish mean? What does the merry-go-round mean? It doesn't mean anything to me.' (pp 53-4).

<sup>35</sup> Basil Bernstein (1977) *Class, Codes and Control* vol. 3, Chapter 6, pp 141, 150

consideration of fundamental issues for a democratic society, for the development of political awareness and happier citizenship.

The discussion of students' answers to the question - *how would you teach literature if you were to, or how would you like literature classes to be* - implies the deconstruction of the pedagogical emphasis on cognition and power as generally understood by teachers and educators. The initial contrast between their silence while watching literature lessons and their eloquence as interviewees addresses deeper aspects of classroom pedagogies. And although in some classroom aspects they seemed to lack linguistic fluency to explain their points-of-view, specially in England, students provided eloquent answers to the question addressing the possibility of exchanging roles. Whereas at Homer School students claimed for socio-cultural empowerment through critical strategies, relevant contents and active participation in society's academic goals, the female clientele at Figtree School closed in itself clustering round didactic technicalities as the process and product of their own education, viewing literature as a gathering of historical facts to be passed on from class to class; and Springhill's middle-class students appeared eager to protect their values and social opportunities by exposing a reactionary face in the confrontation with society's ills both in real life (as in an episode related by teacher Lucy when her students claimed for capital punishment for criminals) and as portrayed in literature.

Their English counterparts presented two main lines of requests, which seemed to characterise two social realities in England: on one hand, out of the urban centres, at the home county, literature students did not address issues beyond the boredom nurtured by passive classroom approaches, into social rules and mechanisms of power and control; for them, all would be well if teachers allowed some discussion and the exchange of points-of-view into textual comprehension. They did not seem to acknowledge the existence of other realities than their own, and the question of multicultural, multiethnic environments met incredulity and disbelief, to be quickly dismissed, along with issues about general politics and society. On the other hand, inner-city students of literature, a heterogeneous group of subjects with varied ethnicities, cultures, histories, social backgrounds and forces, believed that literature education contents and methods could be improved by allowing their multiple cultural and social voices into



classrooms where teacher-student dialogue was supported by common values, ideologies and interests - those of the middle classes literature is supposed to closely resemble and represent.

### ***Reaffirming the Issues***

I found students' silences the most powerful representation of pedagogical metaphors seen in literature classes. Literature teachers have not been instructed to listen to students' voices, and even less to their silences, because most of us, teachers, are unaware that the questions we pose for our students are inevitably value laden, even the innocent-looking ones about form, vocabulary and 'objective' textual elements.<sup>36</sup> Even the most aseptic-looking pedagogical strategies are imbued with political options, so that it is crucial to understand that interaction with texts does not end with the last answer at the discussion, or the last word in an essay. As Scholes writes,

if wisdom, or some less grandiose notion such as heightened awareness, is to be the end of our endeavours, we shall have to see it not as something transmitted from the text to the student but as something developed in the student by questioning the text<sup>37</sup>.

No single approach can provide the tools which will allow students an independence of reading built on self-confidence and the will to speak and be heard. However, when teachers in both countries were requested to determine the critical models, or theories, used in their classroom practices, they lost assertiveness and either denied the importance of critical theoretical knowledge, or confessed to rely on intuitive methods, which they believed were good enough for the present system, and efficient enough in terms of examination passes. As much as students silenced when faced with classroom pedagogies of silence and passivity, literature teachers were also silenced when asked about theoretical knowledge, a problem which addresses the conflict between the academy's intellectual prescriptions on the one hand, and pragmatic demands, dilemmas and contradictions teachers have to face in their working routine on the other.

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<sup>36</sup> Eugene K Garber (1988) 'My Kinsman, Major Molineaux': Some Interpretive and Critical Probes', in Nelms (ed.) op cit., p 100, writes: 'Which readings of texts and which values will be represented in our classrooms? [...] Still another possibility is to put the matter essentially in the hands of our students. What are their own responses, observations, and questions about a given text? What readings do they want and need to explore? Indeed, what readings will they themselves bring to our discussions, readings that we ourselves may not have anticipated?'

<sup>37</sup> Robert Scholes (1985) *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p 14

Reports of satisfactory practices using literature in pre-university classrooms most often describe teachers' encounters with critical theories as a dividing line between less-than-satisfactory practices and enthusiastic experimentation relying on multiple critical approaches, leading to successful findings with students.<sup>38</sup> Thus, I believe that teachers' silences can be explained through the cognitive blanks found in their learning and training, which lack an emphasis on critical theories about literary reading, pedagogical aims and educational processes. When faced with classes characterised by diversity, teachers find themselves instrumentalised only with uncritical methods aimed at an homogeneous, unreal clientele. To realise this inadequacy is the first step towards more sensitive evaluations and practices of themselves and of their students. The willingness to seek and use tools which allow literary and pedagogical achievements encompassing varied ethnic and cultural perspectives can mediate issues of ideological power, as teachers will come to terms with the fact that they are also students, that they are not expected to know everything and that to educate is to work with the student, aiming to find ways to solutions. As Nelms writes, citizenship in the classroom prepares for citizenship in the community of readers/thinkers necessary to the preservation of literacy and liberty (op cit., p 232), be they teachers' or students'.

Bogdan (1988) writes that reading literature contributes to psychic growth by inducing certain states of mind and then questioning them, and once the dialectical process of engagement and detachment is under way, anything may be brought to consciousness. Thus, one of the roles of literature teachers is also to preserve the tension between engagement with the texts as statement and detachment from it as hypothesis:

the enjoyable reading of literature does give with one hand, and the study of its craft, historicity, and ideology takes away with the other. But it is just this capacity of literary language to work against itself that validates its educational significance as perhaps the best pedagogical tool teachers have for both individual growth and social criticism.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For example, those reported by Eugene K Garber, Patricia G Hansbury, James Butterfield, Doris M Quick, Carol Decker Forman, Roseanne Y DeFabio, Mary Hawley Sasse, Regina Cowin, Sylvia White, Elizabeth D Nelms, at different school levels, using various literary texts and critical approaches. In Ben F Nelms (ed.) (1988) *Literature in the Classroom: Readers, Texts, and Contexts*

<sup>39</sup> Deanne Bogdan (1988) 'The Censorship of Literature Texts' in Nelms (ed.), op cit., p 244

Voices in general are silenced in literature classrooms by a pedagogy of silences founded on imposed power as moral model, using literature as indoctrinating material. A plurality of literary genres, authors, critical approaches, and literary and pedagogical theories might protect students from dangerous subliminal ideologies which limit their development as readers and their awareness as social subjects. Bowers writes that some areas of human experience are not represented in the curriculum, and a collective silence in the larger society encircles them, caused either by a lack of communicative competence in focusing and articulating the issues, or by 'the fear that often arises when it is no longer possible to escape existential choices forced on us by critical awareness'. This lack of representation Bowers has called 'audible silence' (p 63). The answers to my question 'are you a political animal' to teachers, for instance, addressed issues of audible silences, and a theoretical denial of democratic empowerment.

The fact that hardly any of the English teachers interviewed declared themselves to be participating in the country's politics, preferring to define themselves as 'social' beings rather than political, may reveal a professional profile distanced from the nation's public destinies, in accordance with the implicitness surrounding other social and cultural issues. I met in England a posture of distance from any overt discussion of public issues in general, which seems to extend to the socio-political reach of literature education, preventing arguments from achieving a desired level of clarity and explicitness. Much seems to be left unsaid, to be inferred from previously acquired layers of knowledge. Socio-political silence in English literature classrooms thus appears simply to follow an accepted pattern of undisclosed values. Among Brazilian teachers, however, full vent was given to political arguments, especially by the teachers whose pedagogical practices seemed more consistent with the will to increase students' levels of social, cultural and political awareness. Political discourse among Brazilian teachers and students was overt and explicit, and silence was to be found in the confrontation with everyday problems, with the disbelief in the social commitment in macro-spheres of power, a problem which undermines popular faith in less unequal futures. However, there seemed to be little understanding of the true role of problematizing pedagogies which, in the specific case of literature education, can only be aimed for through a turn toward theory allied to practised political discourse. Without leaving behind

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purely pragmatic and behaviourist methods, socio-political objectives can hardly be achieved, and pedagogical practices can only fatefully remain at the present shallow level of consciousness achievement.

## CONCLUSION: Answering the questions

This concluding chapter reviews the answers proposed for the questions posed at the introductory chapter, as well as the problem-questions with which this study began.

Speak the word *colleagues*, as if it means  
The tapestry of suffering woven with dancing  
Figures of argument, knowledge suffused  
Finally with communal joy's transforming power.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Back to the Introduction***

When trying to determine the profile of literature education, I posed several questions, one of which was what the study of literature leads to: the building up of better persons, the command of 'higher' written language, the comprehension of historical, political and social facts. I have attempted, in this dissertation, to prove that the central role of literature education should be to empower students for their active and critical participation in society, through exercising in literature classrooms dialogical relations with texts from a theoretical and practical standpoint. The literature education I propose should build up 'better persons' as more competent subjects to engage in and validate citizenship in democratic communities. There is no such thing as the pure knowledge of texts, from a philological point-of-view, because ideological values trespass every human action. Then, it becomes possible to answer what literature is to be studied for, and what its aims are in actual classroom practice.

Literature must not only remain in school programmes, but it must be given a more central role than the one it presently has, without the gender-social class bias which surrounds its classroom realisation. It is the only subject which can offer relish for the senses and emotions in symbiosis with cultural, social, political awareness; a learning of enjoyment and self-knowledge together with the acquisition of values of political participation as social subjects, because there is no such thing as pure intelligibility without an interior aspect<sup>2</sup>. Literature education

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<sup>1</sup> James Schevill, 'Colleagues', *Ambiguous Dancers of Fame*

<sup>2</sup> Jane Tompkins 'A Short Course in Post-Structuralism' in Moran & Penfield (eds.) (1990) *Conversations*, p 29

becomes, as such, a metaphor for individual and social understanding, or intelligibility. It can be educative and be fun.

Literature education can enhance the individual's sensibility to the artistic artefact through the development of senses, emotions and reason, and the balance of those forces is the role of the discipline in the construction of personal-social subjectivities. However, its main contribution must be bridging multi-cultural, unequal societies by promoting an awareness of the ideological values permeating issues of literary taste, choice and power.

Crucial to the proposal is the question of teachers' own learning, more often than not a training in anti-dialogical modes and settings. On the one hand, teachers tend to deny classroom theory, which they usually connect with privilege and situation: theoretical knowledge has often been dissociated from reality, and associated with tradition and scholarship; with 'formality, power and elegance'<sup>3</sup>. It is difficult and complex to resist the temptation of holding power, as promised by conservative schooling, and become mediators of empowerment and self-growth; in order for it to happen, teachers must provide and be provided access to the theoretical tools that will inform them on how to do it, and what the expected outcomes are of teaching a class of active, critical students. Teachers must be aware themselves of the need to problematize power relations in literature and in social life, and as a result, literature education, instead of pursuing a situation of opposition among its actors, can move on from the tug-of-war towards the *mutirão*<sup>4</sup> metaphor, in all classrooms. For that, literature teachers need to become, along with their students, readers, critics, scholars, theoreticians, writers, builders. Literature education demands literary, pedagogical, and political theories inside classrooms, generating 'uncertainties, confusions, and vulnerabilities' (Emig, p 89). The formation of literature teachers should have as founding principles investigation or critical inquiry (holding active control of their own learning through usage, analysis, and evaluation), collaboration (multiple perspectives

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<sup>3</sup> Janet Emig, 'Our Missing Theory', in Moran & Penfield (ed.) (1990) *Conversations*, p 89

<sup>4</sup> Mutirão is a joint effort commonly found in most working-class communities in Brazil, where friends and neighbours get together to help each other build a place to live, or a room, usually at weekends.

within social co-operation), and conscious theorising (to understand principles and be able to transfer them to other contexts).<sup>5</sup>

The question about what there is for students to say that really matters has been authoritatively answered by Freire, in his pedagogy for the oppressed, for the silenced, by proposing that literacy programs for them should start from and encompass their cultural universe. One of the strengths of Freire's work has been to genuinely value the culture and the knowledge every person brings along, no matter their level of literacy. The *Dynamization* project described in Chapter One also attempted to treat primary-school children as the equals they are, allowing their voices to be audible in classroom dialogue with adults, with texts, with cultural values. Whereas in the project's context theories were not debated in the expected 'theoretical format', they were discussed and practised - mainly - as living constructs. It does not seem possible to propose a democratisation of relations without taking into consideration the knowledge and experience students carry, and which must be an integral part of the literature classroom.

Giroux asserts that Freire is a post-colonial theorist in his cultural work as a border crosser who has to reinvent traditions, not within the discourse of submission, reverence, and repetition, but as 'transformation and critique' (1994, p 142). As a cultural border crosser, he views personal identity as 'a site of struggle over the politics of representation, the exercise of power, and the function of social memory', and *home* not simply as the cultural, social, and political boundaries that demarcate varying spaces surrounding an individual or a group a location and positionality, but rather those 'cultural spaces and social formations which work hegemonically and as sites of resistance' (Giroux, 1994, p 143). It is part of Freire's role as a border intellectual, writes Giroux, to disrupt the humanist relationship between individual identity and collective subjectivity, in a project of possibility (p 144).

In this study I have raised questions arising from my experience as a student, a teacher and a teacher of teachers in an unequal society where literature education has unsatisfactorily been dealt with in little experimental, little critical, little problematized fashion. I had found it important to view another culture and

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<sup>5</sup> As suggested for language studies in *The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language*, 1989, apud Emig, op cit., p 93

society and focus on the practices of literature at school, in order to amplify my field of vision, experience other reality and find inspiration to better understand my own literary experience and then be able to propose changes. That I believe has been fulfilled. By viewing lessons and interviewing teachers and students of literature in England I was made aware of the social and cultural gap pervading methods with blurred definitions, limits and outcomes, which end up inevitably as another subject of studies which more or less subtly privileges middle-class learners. I have also been made aware that one of the central difficulties to be found in the Brazilian *informative* curriculum for literature is the denial of its importance in students' formative knowledge. Presented as a hybrid combination of language studies with historical facts to be memorised uncritically, literature is dealt with as a nuisance, as one more subject to add to the burden of exams. However, as the reading of literary texts without the provision of critical tools, or theories, such as the paradigm found in England, literature education requires a trial-and-error method which drains students' interest and self-confidence as readers, while emphasising repetition and blind attempts - to spend three months reading one single novel to exhaustion, looking at the points and details indicated, analysed, explained and dictated by the teacher is another exercise in numb, passive resilience equally far from using literature as a source of pleasure, self-knowledge, and social, political, cultural awareness aiming at the transformation of society into a better place for each and all.

My proposal is not a simple one. In order to fulfil its potential, literature education must be acknowledged as a powerful transformative subject, by teachers, students, and teachers of teachers, by specialists, academics, and legislators. It is my belief that the first step to be taken is to empower literature teachers with the theoretical and practical knowledge the subject requires, so that even current syllabuses can become rich sources of problematization. Brazilian students, for instance, resent the study of Luis de Camões' epic poem *Os Lusíadas*, because it is most often tackled in a static manner, situated inside a historical niche which offers little challenge or relevance to readers as socio-cultural subjects, especially at a time of multicultural and social unrest. Whereas there seems to be nothing wrong with the text, the methods used are positivistically confined to measurements, paraphrasing, language studying and vocabulary enlargement. However, to



understand the grandeur of a dead empire through a high literary achievement can bring light to the understanding of humans' historical struggle for power, adventure, wealth, not at all dissimilar from current events. It may require the sort of historical knowledge which does not see History as an end in itself. Vocabulary learning will be necessary, but not as a central task, by fishing meanings from the text, or memorising lists of ancient nouns as an encyclopaedic aim curled up into itself. To read *Os Lusíadas*, a terror task for teachers and students alike, can be challenging, illuminating, problematized, critical and creative, provided information is combined with personal responses, added to critical theories for textual understanding, exploration and immersion. Its aim then will be the transformative power of a subject which exists as a pleasurable form of art. I have chosen this as an extreme example of non-Brazilian literary text imposed by curricula, at a time feared and rejected as literature education practice at secondary school, by most students and teachers. To use contemporary texts would certainly be at least equally rewarding.

This can hardly be achieved, however, in forty-five weekly meetings with students, as happens in Brazilian secondary schools, in contrast to the time allocation to subjects considered more important, difficult, and central to the curriculum, such as Portuguese (language) and mathematics, which count on a fourfold time provision. This can hardly be achieved while the literary training of teachers is based upon measurement and translation of a limited set of texts to be read and examined, in an uncritical, linear, unchallenging form, not unusually through lectured classes in which lecturing teachers at universities exhibit their scholarly expertise of a one-handed view, allowing little space for discussion, interaction, true criticism and relevant knowledge construction. Experience has shown that literature as a subject of studies should rarely be lectured upon; on the contrary, it should be the founding space for aesthetic, cultural, personal, socio-political exchange, transformation and growth, the border crossing alluded to above.

Some texts are believed to offer a better ground (or more potentialities) for problematized learning; I think every text can contribute to personal and social awareness, even those which seem innocuous, naive or superficial. Symbols are formed by each reader's mind, and literature education should aim at helping

develop a critical view of those symbols. By making use of different critical theories, different meanings can be raised and developed in classrooms where voices are allowed and genuinely heard.

### ***Suggested recommendations***

Within the present structure in Brazil, with a programme of literary studies entirely founded on factual data about literature, immediate recommendations are circumscribed to the realm of classroom strategies, teaching-learning methods and interactive approaches aiming at a criticism of contents, for instance, as problematization of literature education at managerial and pedagogical levels. I believe that even far-from-ideal syllabuses can be dealt with critically and attending to socio-political awareness. Thus, instead of using textbooks as the sole source of informative truth, teachers and students might interact more creatively by proposing, discussing and even arguing for changes to the syllabus, to the textbook, consulting other sources of information, confronting literary texts with historical texts and documents, in order to distinguish literary (from historical) treatments of social contexts, and the human artistic use of the word in such situations. On the other hand, the literature education syllabuses seen in England have not appeared suitable to societies searching for more democratic relations, at least in the modes viewed; truth and knowledge would be transferred from textbooks to the responsibility of literature teachers, and blurred principles and values of criticism and assessment might overtake the concern for democratic opportunities through objective factual contents.

It seems neither paradigm is entirely satisfactory, in spite of some inherent qualities found in each. The main objective towards achieving an ideal mode for literature education requires changes in the macro-structures of educational power, where legislators decide on programmes, salaries, resources and targets. The only way to countervene the risks of covert cultural and social biases would be the teaching of literary theories, not in formalist fashion, with recipes and lists of traits to be hunted for in texts, but instead as a training in critical awareness of different modes of reading, which are intrinsically connected with ways of looking at social matters. Teachers and students, instead of limited by personal values in their problematization of literature, would become acquainted with the principles of

selective criteria founded on different theories, instrumented to perform a truly critical analysis, by making links between them and their social contexts of origin, and the intrinsic social, cultural and political contributions, gaps, and contradictions found. And then, literary works would be submitted to their own critical readings, making a creative use of theories as objective instruments at the service of cultures, pedagogies and social subjects.

In order to problematize, as well as to democratise literary knowledge, access must be granted to all students of all social groups to the texts so far circumscribed to the select privileged few. It requires considering other ways of thinking, providing a guarantee of access to our cultural wealth, as a first step towards conscious freedom, and towards the acquisition of personal and social self-esteem, for better futures for all.

Three points appear as relevant: the appropriation of critical tools for reader empowerment, the democratisation of literature classrooms, and the recognition of the politico-pedagogical power of literature. Even the study of literary history can be a source of critical knowledge and readers' empowerment, provided it is not treated as a determined set of fixed elements, but instead as 'the preceding experience of the literary work by its readers'<sup>6</sup>. If students cannot relate to culture at the symbolic, abstract level required of them, they stand little chance of success. In fact, most materials are suitable for study, if the reading is critical and the aim is not to achieve passive domestication of teachers and students.

In a democratic society, where every individual opinion counts, and where nothing, finally, is left to some king or group of party elitists, art's incomparable ability to instruct, to make alternatives intellectually and emotionally clear, to spotlight falsehood, insincerity, foolishness - art's incomparable ability, that is, to make us understand - ought to be a force bringing people together, breaking down barriers of prejudice and ignorance, and holding up ideals worth pursuing.<sup>7</sup>

I find it improbable to establish fixed methods in literature classrooms aiming at self-development and critically aware citizenship, since each student will bring into it their own experiences, memories and cultural variances. The pedagogical direction towards the provision of democratic opportunities ought not to lie on the values pre-acquired in middle-class realms of origin, but on the critical

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<sup>6</sup> H.R. Jauss (1982) *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, p 20

<sup>7</sup> J. Gardner (1978) *On Moral Fiction*, New York: Basic Books, p 42; apud Robert E. Probst 'Readers and Literary Texts', in *Literature in the Classroom* (1988) ed. Ben F. Nelms, p. 25

tools which can clarify relationships, knowledges (of self, of others, of texts, of contexts, of processes), while at the same time recognising pleasure (instead of boredom in its various forms) as a significant goal for the curriculum.<sup>8</sup> A literature education curriculum designed to encourage students to create knowledge, respecting the uniqueness of individual response, and the characteristics of adolescent readers/students, should necessarily involve them more closely in the dialogue which founds true literature. Such curriculum would accept a wider range of literary modes of discourse through analytical exploration and expression, ultimately aiming at the development of levels of awareness built on meaning making, on the critical creation of knowledge, thus contributing to the improvement of the human condition.

The contribution proposed herein for the teaching and learning of literature in Brazil and in other societies is the discussion of literature as an important discipline not only for the understanding of one's society and culture, but also as a critical view of ampler socio-political matters. The ultimate objective of this project has been to suggest ways to optimise literature education as a discipline of studies so that it can achieve the aims proposed, towards more pleasurable means mediating encounters with social cultures and political awareness. By emphasising the role of literature as a socio-cultural discipline, this study deals with literature education as a symbolic representation of societies; as such, the more explicit and overtly dealt with paradigms point to a more open mode of social interaction, whereas implicit structures were found in less open systems, visible in the description of empirical evidence.

This is not meant to be a project for Brazilian classrooms only. It aims to represent democratic possibilities for any social subjects against a pedagogy of silence, oppression and maintenance of differences. It should be feasible in multicultural societies whose values are explicitly presented and differences mostly imposed by the limits of spending power; and in other equally multicultural societies, where a whole range of implicit differences (in ethnic origin, in socio-cultural background, in more or less evident forms and norms) determine one's place in society. Empowerment will not depend on the hidden access to in-built elements which should have been learned at home. It will come through the overt

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<sup>8</sup> Also recommended by Probst (1988) 'Readers and Literary Texts', in Nelms (ed.) op cit., p 27.

discussion of theories of reading, of literature, of pedagogy, of politics, with *theory* taking a central, not peripheral role, allowing socio-cultural, literary, pedagogical and political contextualization. That is exactly what literature education is made from. I will not fantasise the homogenisation of perspectives for entire cultural, economic, and social groups; however, priority must be given to the critical understanding and discussion of literature, education, and politics based on the free speech of a pluralist society, by reducing misunderstanding and by opposing those imposed silences.

## Appendices

### Quotations from teachers' interviews

#### At Figtree School

##### Ney:

'I used to have a wonderful teacher of History, a gifted speaker, who called our attention to facts and causes... before him I used to hate having to memorise dates, and he talked about the social side and its role, the historic consequences, he influenced me very much in the study of History... to this day, sometimes students ask me whether I teach History... When I started, teaching was all based upon texts, the History teacher would get his syllabus and ours, and while studying the Baroque movement, he would teach 'Inconfidencia Mineira', and all that together. The language was similar, and it was much easier to achieve our goals. (...) It seems recently students have lost certain capacities others apparently used to have. For example, in literature, they only seem to enjoy it after you go through the historical bit, but to really feel the literary text, you can count a mere two or three in class... Now if you get a song and link it to the literary text, then... it opens up. (...) They come with this gap, this blank, specially of Brazilian history, you see?... (Literature as history) helps with textual interpretation from the moment the student has a cultural baggage that comes from the study of general history... if you talk about Neptune... today, for example, no one knew what Neptune was...'

##### Lena:

'While I was doing my degree in Letters, I started to understand the mechanics of that literature-cum-history thing, how it worked, and I started to like it. (...) My lesson planning is very much at random, I see something, remember a detail, take copies of texts... Our literature students have no reading habits, even of comics. So for them to get a text and interpret it, it is very very difficult. There is already a barrier, they get a text and immediately say 'Gee, teacher, do we have to read it all?' ...they have that laziness, even before knowing what the text is about... an unjustified rejection, a priori, and it is difficult for them to interpret texts. I think it comes from primary school, they don't work on reading and interpretation. (...) Literature as history, as requested by the exams, unless it is for the exams, serves the purpose of only helping their reading. (...) But there should be more interdisciplinary engagement, like in the case of history, we waste a lot of time explaining historic facts, more history than literature; and I miss Latin very much, in the classroom... the knowledge of words helps a lot the interpretation of texts...'

##### Louise:

1.

'I had an excellent teacher when I studied here, at Figtree School, called Marlene. She never limited text reading to Brazilian or Portuguese authors, she'd let us meet translations, other texts [the absence of which] is a taboo we follow to this day, which is rather nonsensical, I think. (...) I find it very difficult to follow the syllabus, and to plan in writing. I've always been like that. My pedagogical training was a nightmare at university...'

2. '(...here) the pedagogical level is appalling, students don't read at all. They have no formation as readers, they do not read... you give them a theme, all you

get is crap, they know nothing about what is going on... (...) Also the lack of interest, they do not acquire the material, they refuse to buy one single book... But I do give them what the syllabus requires, since there is a syllabus, and there are people watching what is done... So, Romanticism, Realism... I try to do it the best way I can, e.g. the 'Song of Exile', I get various songs of exile, and work on them together with the students. (...) With children's literature, we use textual production, creation... story telling, musical creation, etc. (...) I would suggest interdisciplinarity, it's so important to work together with history and other subjects, since in the end we, literature teachers, have to talk about arts, history, foreign languages, etc.'

### **At Homer School**

#### Marian:

'Portuguese language and literature cannot be taught just like maths, or chemistry... they must be connected to all...(.) The proposal we have, an imposed one, is to teach literature through periods. Rigorously, school syllabuses include the study of genres and periods, in literature. Only that I think that... when you deal with earlier-century texts, you cannot think that they are stuck there, that the text belongs entirely to that period. Life is dynamic. Many things produced in the 16th century have points of contact with today's production. The way to show this is to do a comparative study... [about the use of theories] I'm afraid of defining this like that [=theoretically]...'

#### Judy:

1.

'I believe in working with literature with a view at the vestibular's demands, the way things are done in the exams, what is demanded and how it works... The vestibular system has been suffering changes throughout recent years, as you know. And I have been following those changes, I'm keen on getting all the vestibular exams from different universities, to see what the focus is on literature. Nowadays there is an emphasis on literature over language. And in my lessons I always try to instrumentalize students for the exams. (...) To tell you the truth, students only study literature because they are told to, to get ready for vestibular exams, and... that's it. Students don't appreciate reading, they are not attracted to read. It may happen, but then it is independent from the sort of teaching the student gets.'

2. In 1973, when I entered the State system as a teacher, the middle classes weren't there anymore. The students with less spending power were then entering the system... that docile, receptive student who not always replied to your questions... it was then very easy to teach in the public system, and in fact we used to prefer those students, passive and humble... students listened to me, were very different. Nowadays it has all changed, with the return of the middle classes to the State school, but a different middle class from that in the fifties and sixties... This new middle class, impoverished, comes from private primary schools, and the former State school student is struggling to maintain his space here, while the new comer is accommodating himself to what he finds here... I'm talking about the morning-shift student.. (...) although it is expected that private-school students should bring a valuable body of knowledge foundation, in fact they do not hold that.

Martha:

'... the syllabus is this... Literature at year three is a quilt, each little piece has characteristics of previous periods, and you must know the part representing the whole, and the whole for the part... So in my mind, when you study Modernism you must interrelate epochs, periods, social development, political, religious, scientific findings, everything that supports man's social foundation... man's life. If students don't know that Symbolism was a highly suggestive movement, for example, how then can they understand a text by Cecília Meireles, if she is highly symbolist... and modernist at the same time?'

Beth:

1.

'I was rather disappointed in university... there was a huge potential of emotion linked to literature, but people were always worried about which text excerpt characterised this or that school of thought, when the author was born... One of my main difficulties is the adolescents' resistance to reading, which wears you out... a formative problem created by the national conjuncture... You either remain on the surface, or you get into the text to find the symbols. To study literature involves it, the rediscovery of the symbol, so that you can see in it the myriads of facets it can represent for you. I do believe in Semiotics, as I'm searching for the identification of the reader with the text. (...) In my view, literature cannot be seen as a subject to be taught. For instance, musical education, artistic education, literature.... can they be subjects, disciplines, with marks and grades? No, they should never. It should involve liking, choice, and not obligation.'

2. 'I came to work in the State system only ten years ago, coming from the private realm where I have been teaching for the past 22 years. I carry with me all the 'faults' from the private school: I'm punctual, assiduous, I give all my lessons, I prepare lessons and tests, my diary is always kept up to date... You know? These are considered defects in the State system, and I brought all these faults with me when I came. Then, I find students see this as some kind of respect for them as human beings.'

3. '(In order to optimise literature education) I think there should be a mobilisation among teachers. First of all, they don't come prepared to teach literature, they feel literature is just getting hold of a text, asking questions about it, and correcting the answers... that's it. Then they list the characteristics of given styles, and it's done with. I see very little discussion, extra materials, films, texts, prompting for students' participation... it's too much as if literature were biology... to memorise a bunch of names, dates, facts... A subject-matter like literature, art taken to school, if not filled with a profound dose of emotion...'

**At Springhill School**Lucy:

'... students are not aware that literature is a form of art and the expression of a people's culture. (...) We have tried to resist (...) the low-quality writers, the



many Paulos Coelhos around us... My planning is much in relation to the contents I'm teaching, less experimental in the third years (...), probably because I'm already addicted to one formula... I think the English pattern we were talking about is quite complicated. The first thing that occurs to me is how I would teach there, in England... as a student and as a teacher... I think it is a very authoritarian practice, mainly because the teacher becomes the textual truth owner... I think it is reductive, because students then become mere reproducers of what teachers say.'

Anne:

'In year Two I try to use a bit of theoretical knowledge, from Romanticism on. It depends on the students, but textual analysis may become more meaningful if you propose a structuralist process,... or a formalist analysis. (...) In year One they deal simply with literary questions, textual interpretation, the identification of narrator, personage, etc., without any theoretical attachment. (...) You have the vestibular exams, demanding a sort of teaching and learning, dictating how things must be done. (...) Students resist to reading. Nobody reads, that's the truth. Ideally, we need a larger number of lessons, with literature being studied from the two last years of first-grade school, not as we do, but with a bit of systematisation and sensibilisation... for example, the question of literary art, which a few books are already doing, questioning language and literature as systems of communication, the variables and variations, the literary text presented to the student as a work of art... Teaching literature implies knowing to better contextualize historically, not inverting and prioritising history, with that deterministic view that no one can escape history...'

### **At Hollybush School**

Hollybush is situated in a small shire town; most of its male population commutes or drives to work in larger cities. Most women seem to work at home. Its clean, lovely *village* boasts numerous beauty parlours, charity shops, expensive boutiques, pubs and restaurants, looking amazingly prosperous for its size (about 3,000 residents). Like a stereotypical oasis of wealth, many houses are surrounded by landscaped gardens, and brand-new luxury cars abound. At election time, Tory candidates greet their prospective supporters with buttons and badges outside the train station. There are barely any foreign faces, and not much public socialising: no social clubs, no public swimming pool, cinema or theatre, except for the 'common' where families picnic and play games in the summer, and the exclusive golf club. That shire-county town has had a flourishing business in private health insurance, including a large and well-equipped local hospital belonging to a leading name.

### Observation of other classes

#### **1. A year eight:**

The day's task was to produce a sample of stereotypical speech by a children's television presenter, a teacher, a priest, a footballer, a disk-jockey or a policeman. The majority of students chose to write and role-play the teacher's

text, which they performed by mockingly shouting, demanding attention, silence or homework, or punishing pupils (as recorded). Mr J embarrassedly suggested that there should be *at least one positive feature to be performed*; he frequently interrupted the lesson to offer further explanation about what they were doing, allowing me into their action.

2. An upper-sixth:

Mrs B did all the reading, vocabulary explanation and interpretation while the eight students seemed to remain perfectly silent (although from my seat I could see them exchanging written notes and making eye-contact), annotating on their books. While walking to this classroom, Mrs B had made some comments about the low level of her students, specially the two male ones, *hopeless cases who only did English because they did not seem fit for anything else*.

3. A year seven:

Another teacher soon joined the group, and introduced herself to me as the head of learning support, whose role is *basically cognitive, but with effects on their behaviour and self-esteem, their integration and happiness, helping her to know them better all through their school lives*. She started helping students check the exercises on their books, while Mr G gave marks to those who queued up in front of his desk. A lot of bullying was going on between the two boys in front of me, unnoticed by either teacher.

Sue:

1.

- We are... this is an excellent department, I think it is the best department in the school. Supportive colleagues, and integrated ideas.

(interviewer)- Would you say it's the strongest department in the school?

- Oh yes, yes! Mr. L [the headteacher] says it's the best it's ever been. It's an excellent department, and they're jolly lucky to have us.

(interviewer)- And between departments?

- No. I think that people who decide here should just forget the money, the extra thousands, and think more of quality, rather than the profit. I think other schools have more astringent guide-lines than here.

2. 'Well, I'm a great believer in bringing in as many other things as possible, not just that book. Like any sort of scraps of information that make it more interesting, bring a bit of vividness to it... (...) Now I thought that they've had absolutely so much of this poetry [Tennyson], I haven't finished it... I said right, we're gonna have a break from this, and then do our novel, and then we'll come back and combine the rest of the poetry with revision of it, because the thing maybe is getting... out of earshot with it, really, from doing so much, so we've gone completely away from that now, into twentieth-century literature...'

3. 'They're restricted... Their vocabulary is getting smaller and smaller..., compared to her own learning strategy: I myself have a notebook at home where I write every new word I come across... I say ask me now or find out for yourself later...'

4. ...'But I do find [Sue lowers her voice]... I feel very strongly that people here do A level when they should not be allowed to do A level, because... this is confidential... because they're lacking in motivation, they don't really

understand what's involved in the A level, and they regard it as a two-year holiday. And because the school gets paid generously for the presence of those pupils, people are allowed to do it who shouldn't do it, and who lower the general standard overall. I did stick out very firmly this year and absolutely insisted that one girl should not be allowed to do it.' ... 'she lacked the necessary skills to do literature: she could not write, her spelling was atrocious'...

### At the Inner-city College

Mark:

1. 'I do half-termly sections of what we are going to study and what we are going to cover, so I do this every half term. I didn't use to do that in secondary school, but I found... I suppose it's because we are much tighter... more tightly... tied in to exams' surfaces, I need to be sure I'm covering everything. And also it gives me a real sense of purpose of why we are doing it, you know, so I actually know why we are doing it, and I try to tell the students why we are doing it. (...) I always plan by myself, and I always tell them, I mean... I can remember my film studies teacher... Someone said 'why do we look at this film' and he said 'because I like it' (laughter); it is a good enough reason'.

2. 'I think you can get round that by really encouraging discussion so that it doesn't matter what viewpoint someone points... it's kind of instinctive in my nature, it's toward the opposite point, and I have an instinctive nature anyway. So whatever viewpoint is put, you put across a different one, and when students realise that they keep quite confident to put in their voice. The trouble with that is when you get a large class of confident people, and you have too many different voices (laughter), and the less able students if they've already found their own voice they can use that very well, otherwise it can get extremely confuse as... they come and ask what this thing means, and I say it can mean anything you want it to mean. [...] I give it, so if they want to use a theoretical framework, it's there for them to take and develop it. I mean, brilliant students, like that I mentioned before... and she came and asked me about Derrida, she wanted a name, and I gave her a name, and two weeks later she came back with three different books by Derrida and she asked 'which one do you think is'... And I said I've only read one! (laughter)'

3. ... 'you know, there's this big thing about what was assonance and dissonance, I didn't know, and I was interested in another English teacher to know, she had gone for a coffee... I couldn't tell the difference, I got very confused... and even if there was a difference, what the hell was its importance anyway?'

4. 'There's a lot of work in... filing cabinets, so I always go and see what other people have done and then see how much you can fit that in to your teaching... Sometimes you can be lucky, and fit about everything in. You may if you want (...) I mean occasionally you have a difficult week, like I've just moved, or something, you just grab something you know can get you through the lesson. The lesson can often mean that the... you get no idea of why the worksheet stresses this, they ask you why is this set for, so... I ask myself 'why is this set for?' and you don't know (laughter).'

Some of the activities proposed by Mark to his lower-sixth class, on Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*: 1. 'How would you describe the layout - what is it meant to remind you of? What roles do the titles play - how would you describe the style of these titles? 2. Try and describe the style. How factual is it for a non-fiction text? Examine the humour and find two passages that amuse you and explain what is about them that makes them stand out. 3. Nick Hornby says that the book is about being an obsessive, a fan. I think it is about at least 3 other things - do you agree and if so what is it about to you. 4. Autobiographies are normally about someone famous or something dramatic - find 2 passages that might explain why this book was published.' Essay titles: write an (fictional) autobiography of the early years of someone 'famous' who has an obsession in life OR explain the style that Nick Hornby uses in *Fever Pitch*. Is it successful in capturing the emotions and events of a young person's life?

Pennie:

... 'but I think that although I knew that that wasn't the right attitude at all, I myself maybe thought that literature could be an indulgence rather than a job... do you see what I mean? And... so... I then became a more serious reader when I was teaching at 'Pebbles', in Southeast London... and I also read much more fiction for myself. And I decided that... I started teaching. I went to do Social Work and I decided that it was dreadful, handed in my notice, and they made me do an extra month... during that time I found a supply teaching job... telling everybody I wasn't a teacher, I wasn't going to be a teacher, I didn't want to be a teacher... but actually teaching in inner-city was completely different, was very difficult, and I liked the challenge. So at the end of that year I went up and did a Post-Graduate Certificate and the lessons that I most liked doing were the English lessons, not the sociology lessons, I didn't want to go and talk about poverty and statistics, and the family... I thought it was all daft somehow...'

Some guidance handed out by Pennie to her lower-sixth class, about to how to act in exam situation:

'read through carefully, find out the gist, look for colours, descriptions of weather, of nature, of every day objects and the mood they create, for obvious imagery, associations and connotations. You should find a "story" in the poem, visualise its setting, get its particular message, special lines, the relationship of the title to the poem, repetition of words, phrases or lines, the sound, etc. Then reread it, and set to write, planning your time'.

Rose:

'But even then I think... in my early years of teaching I wouldn't see myself as a great reader, I was busy enjoying life and doing all sorts of other things. I did an MA mainly in [...] literature in my late twenties, when I was living [abroad]. And I think that was a big turning point for me. And I became really very very much interested in the whole subject area and criticism, and in all sorts of things I hadn't known before. And I think that since then I've been much more into it, and I've become a sixth-form teacher, or a secondary-school teacher, so much more A-level teaching and so on... As I got older, I've done more and become more confident I suppose as a critic.'

### **Quotation from other enquiry**

Referring to the Hull enquiry with O- and A-level students of literature, Protherough acknowledges the difficulty faced by teachers, having to reconcile their own, the students', and the examiners' perceptions of aims, roles and achievements of the course. Although positive in their comments about the variety and diversity of texts for study and the encouragement received to read more widely and attentively, those A-level students were critical of the nature of the examination, and of teaching methods dictated by the examination, which justified the 'teacher-dominated discussions, over-analytical approaches to texts and monotony of methods', as written by one of them: 'it is not the study of a book which puts me off, but the way in which the book is studied' (p 18). In one group, students mentioned the newly acquired independence in planning work and in formulating ideas, although they seemed conscious of 'a basic ambiguity in their position', urged to be independent and form their own ideas, but at the same time experiencing teaching methods which denied the advice given. The majority of students found that even though they had enjoyed a book on first reading, extended study had destroyed that pleasure (p 27).

Students' perceptions of teaching methods, from the survey mentioned by Protherough, varied from finding that 'copying down the teacher's notes was the commonest practice', although the one they most rejected, to an emphasis on talking and discussing things orally as the strategy most favoured by them (p 37). The importance of discussion to students, according to Protherough, has been picked up in other enquiries, but there is no indication that it has actually been done. In some cases, students felt that in spite of encouragement towards talking and giving a personal response, they felt that there were unspoken constraints, imposed by the hidden agenda surrounding the examination situation.

### **Preparation for fieldwork in Brazil**

Before leaving for fieldwork in Brazil, I 'mini-piloted' the interview questions with nearly seventeen-year-old Anna, a Brazilian student on holidays in London, before embarking on her last year of secondary school in Rio, which would prepare her to enter the vestibular exams. The aim of the piloting exercise was to test the viability for Brazilian students of the questions posed to the English students.

Anna was a student at Springhill, one of the schools viewed. As all Brazilian students, she would have to enter the competitive exams on all school subjects (Portuguese, a foreign language, literature, composition, maths, physics, biology/sciences, chemistry, history, geography and social-political studies), between December and January, in order to enter the course of her choice in a given university. She would not be offered places, like in England, but would hopefully get one according to her classification in the overall results. In the Brazilian system, students carry with them only the final results of their secondary education, which do not grant access to university education, although consisting of a pre-requirement: as a rule, they are asked to supply a certificate of completion of secondary education when enrolling for the exams. Each institution of higher education holds their own examination system, but contents follow the official syllabuses endorsed by the Councils of Education. Students can apply to more than

one university, provided that the exams dates do not coincide; their passes can grant them a place at the chosen course for that year only, according to each candidate's classification and the number of places offered. The English system privileges the candidate's evidence of content knowledge as acquired academic baggage: once having passed the Advanced-level examinations, students can take a year off, or apply to different courses at any time.

Anna was not very sure of what she wanted to do, perhaps Cinema or Law. To update my knowledge, she informed me that literature at school consisted of: a) studying from a book with historic-literary data (dates, authors' names, works, genres, facts and characteristics of literary periods); and b) a number of set texts, on which students perform a search for characteristics, but not exactly *explicación de texto*. Students are trained in a form of analysis which deals with signifiers in texts, genres and literary movements. Apparently not much seemed to have changed since I had been abroad. Her training for *redação* was usually done by her language teacher, and sometimes in workshops treated as a bonus by all involved. Anna was expected, in the *redação* exam, to write correctly, critically and creatively about a current event, or a general topic for discussion. As preparation, Anna was required to read 'serious' magazines and newspapers, watch television and go to the cinema, which she did not do. She comes from a low middle-class family, who were facing financial difficulties at the time of our interview, but who privilege Anna's education and leisure: she went to an alternative primary school and was now at Springhill, an expensive full-time school. In her spare time, she has had classical ballet and guitar tuitions. Her ticket to London was bought on several instalments. Contrary to my expectations, Anna was not terribly bored with school, and valued it most for its social aspect: that's the realm of making and meeting friends. She seemed to have the advantage of State secondary school candidates. She asked me about the English system, and found it much easier; after all, 'personal response' sounded like a subjective matter under subjective criteria, whereas in Brazil she must memorise names, dates, facts, motives and characteristics for the exams. However, after I explained to her that it involved a series of unclear elements, with an implicit pattern to be followed, she changed her mind.

### **Quotations from students' interviews**

#### Anna (piloting interview):

Anna's answers showed that literature was not among her favourite subjects; that she really wanted to be a film director, against her parents' will; she was not surprised at what she had encountered at school in terms of literature education, although she had expected it to be more about reading. She refused to answer question four, saying she would never teach literature, and recognised no profit from studying it. About question six, she said that for a short while she had taken part in a social club sponsored by her local (Catholic) church, more for the opportunity of meeting people and making new friends. She said to enjoy music, going to the cinema and going out in her spare time. Unfortunately, Anna did not pass the 1995 vestibular exams, and would have to spend another year in preparation before re-sitting exams in December 1996.

## At Homer School

### Beth's students, afternoon shift:

1.

- 'Well, my ideal literature lessons would follow the formal syllabus of the school. Through epoch styles, from informative literature, to the post-modern literature, all right? But perhaps I'd try a variation, and try to establish more textual analysis; a critical analysis of literary texts. To make the literature lesson something specific, placing the student in front of all the problems that have happened in this country. I can give an example: what better sample for the study of socio-economic problems in Bahia than through the study of Jorge Amado's literature? Or to remember Euclides da Cunha and Os Sertões?... in spite of not being fictional, it's veridical.'

(18-year-old male student of low-income background, with a vast reading experience, by the end of the afternoon shift at the Homer School, after another wasted day without lessons for shortage of teaching staff. After adding that he intended to read Philosophy at university, he stoically acknowledged his dim chances to pass to a public university, as a student coming from a State school.)

2.

- 'I think that the time allotted to the study of literature is extremely short, and the syllabus too large for the three years of secondary school. I believe it would make things much easier if the study started earlier, just like history is given at pre-primary school.[...] I work in a pre-primary school myself and we use the Paulo Freire method there; and we teach the children that all that's in the world can be put on paper as well. This makes it much easier for children to understand the situation they live, like 'why am I poor?' 'why am I disabled?', or 'why can't I hear everything?', because then the child starts to analyse things, right? Literature at pre-primary school is very well received. It enters the child's world. It's important not to think of literature as the study of Romanticism, Renaissance, this secondary-school thing... we waste a lot of time with it! I think it must appear from the beginning, and in a much lighter way. This sort of study, at secondary school, is massive and heavy, you study Romanticism, then you jump on to another movement, and then to another, and you have to memorise who was from such movement, such period, what that epoch was, what happened in history that originated that movement, and I think it is very massive and boring.'

(female student, who works as ancillary staff in a kindergarten)

3.

- (1st) This is a good lesson. Last year we had a teacher who was very good at the beginning, but as he suffered a personal problem, in time his lessons started to get tiring and meaningless... By the end of the year, the general level of that teacher's classes had fallen terribly.

- (2nd) And he was not approachable, remember?

- (1st) He said this is Romanticism, and that's it, there were no studies, no exchange, no debates or anything... I hated his lessons, I couldn't stand them anymore, so I didn't come anymore.

- (3rd) He gave the subject-matter itself, and that was it, good-bye.

- (1st) Sometimes the students have the capacity to learn, to interact, but teachers just don't want it to happen. I would never teach like that: just to pour on the students all that I know... without worrying whether they've learned or not. It takes a bit more than that, to be a good teacher.

4.

- I'd only teach interesting stuff, getting lots of different points and things, texts, etc. Bringing newspapers, magazines, etc. I kept telling a teacher we had last year: change your lessons, change your planning, but she never did, and it was a real tiring thing... No one ever learned anything with her... She never brought a text, nothing to interpret... never a question, a dialogue... She would come and start asking: what is this? What is that? And everything very much at random, with no connection between one lesson and the other.

Almir's students', morning shift:

1.

- (A male student) 'I read everything. From books to outdoors. I don't like literature very much...the literature I study at school. To study it takes most of the pleasure away. You see, you have to study literature even if you're not going to use it later. You want to study engineering, for example, and you must read for the exams. I think subjects should be separated by area... That's the way it should be here... You have no interest in that, so it becomes much more difficult... Here at the Homer School, for example, there is very little incentive, like in the majority of schools, I think it is difficult to find that. I have no interest in anything in the area of communication per se, and am obliged to study it...I feel it is a waste of time, because I should be studying for the other subjects that are more related to my area of choice...'

- (first female) I like reading for leisure and pleasure, not for school. If I could choose, I'd do Physics, Maths, Chemistry, and Biology.

- (second female) I read a lot. I can't go to bed without reading; and on Sundays I go to the newsagent's early, and simply devour the newspaper. Now at school, I find it very rare to have a teacher who teaches us literature in a pleasant way. I did have a teacher once who was out of this world; more than a teacher, he was in fact a talker, his lessons were based on conversation, in exchange with students.'

2.

- (female) It's horrible! And some teachers won't answer your questions, or will tell you you make idiotic questions. Once I had a problem with a teacher, because I asked her something, and she said this is a stupid question, and I'm not answering it.

- (male) I was sent out of the classroom once because of that. If I participated, he said I was engaged in private conversation, and he would always get upset with me, because I was just exposing my ideas. In the classroom, teachers tend to believe they're always right, and students are always wrong. They don't think twice, and never accept students' ideas. Why? And if I'm right? As he's the authority, he gets authoritarian... I think this is wrong. I just can't help it.

- (2nd female) They have to justify their correction. They simply say: you're wrong, but... I want to know why I'm wrong. And I want to know what the correct answer is. - How about you? Say something...

- (1st female) I agree that you need to talk and exchange. Basically it's just copying and copying and a lot of input, and we're, many times, totally lost. Then teachers complain that we're thick, stupid... I think they should be calmer...

- (male student) I hate political programs on TV, before election time...



- (1st female) I think it is important, but personally I don't like politicians, because they promise a lot, and it's not really about that.
  - (2nd) I try to keep informed about what is happening in the world, because I think that an alienated person is next to nothing. He/she just helps to maintain the system as it is. And that's what they want: totally alienated people, so that they can do whatever they want. They already do!
  - (male) They are not interested in intelligent people. Those are more difficult to manipulate. They just want you to know where you stamp your thumb full of ink, and where you mark you cross in the little square [he's talking about elections, about the balloting system].
  - (2nd) The educational system in this country is going from bad to worse; nowadays they've eliminated the initial literacy year, kids go straight on to the first year... And with those salaries, evidently there are no conditions for teachers to work. That's exactly what they want. Few students willing to study, and they are getting fewer and fewer...
- 3.
- To study it takes most of the pleasure away. You see, you have to study literature even if you're not going to use it later... You have no interest in that, so it becomes much more difficult...
  - Now at school, I find it very rare to have a teacher who teaches us literature in a pleasant way. I did have a teacher once who was out of this world; more than a teacher, he was in fact a talker, his lessons were based on conversation, in exchange with students... real hard texts, he'd make them simple, and teach us all about Greek mythology, history etc. And he talked to us.

### **At Figtree School**

#### Lena's students:

1.  
'I find it a bit complicated, too difficult, too many things to put out... but I find it locked up inside, I don't understand everything, I get mixed up with too many things, too much information, ... in the case of understanding poetry, for example, things get too complicated, too mixed up, and it's hard to understand all those things together. I don't understand epochs, periods very much, just a little, but I don't like literature very much, no...'
2.  
'I don't know, I would like to put things into practice, to compare texts, and see more or less the way things used to be, compared to the way things are now... Something like that, because if you only read, you barely understand at all, sometimes the book requires a summary, to have things better explained, whatever happened before... Summarised information is better to understand, the more summarised, the better it is for understanding, for you to learn that bit of subject. If you only read, you won't understand, because there are many words you simply don't understand, it gets in the air, it is too difficult, you don't understand properly what is written in the book. That's what I would do, to summarise as much as I could, to pass to my students... Literature is quite complicated indeed, difficult to understand...'
3.  
Lena's mature student, R, deviated from the topic, when she complained about her third working journey, at home, after school and work, a deeply settled gender issue: the less schooled tend to behave in a more macho manner,

regardless of sex, and the housework is seen as circumscribed to the feminine realm. She added that her husband would go to a neighbour and ask for food, if she refused to prepare a meal, which would put her to serious shame among the neighbourhood.

- On weekends you get even with your sleep then...?
- No, I can't, I have to clean up the house, to wash and iron, as I have no time during week days...
- Don't you get any help from anyone?
- No, there's nobody, because the daughter works and studies, does extra courses, and the son is married, so...
- And the husband?
- He works out, and (giggle) men don't like doing housework very much...
- Do you ask him for help?
- Well, I do ask, but he says he's tired from work...
- But you work as much or more than he does! ... between school and work.
- Well, there's no other way...

#### Ney's students:

- Literature is quite complicated indeed, difficult to understand...
- Literature requires studying, and I do, not because I fancy it, just because I need to.
- I don't know, perhaps it is an important subject, but in my head I don't think it is.

#### **Some syllabuses in England**

1.

The Oxford and Cambridge literature syllabus was adopted by both the second inner-city school and the second home-county school. Classroom activities observed were:

- .students reading monologues aloud: three lessons (male teacher with a lower-sixth group, on Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*)
- .teacher reading novel aloud: two lessons (female teacher reading *Sons and Lovers* to a lower-sixth group)
- .students reading poetry aloud: five lessons (a male teacher interrupted to explain meanings and vocabulary to an upper-sixth group and Wordsworth to a lower-sixth)
- .teacher analysing poetry: five lessons (following the above)
- .students analysing poetry: one lesson (lower-sixth, following male teacher's instructions on a hand-out)
- .teacher analysing Shakespeare's play: two lessons (male teacher doing *Othello* with a lower-sixth group).

The Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board leaflet prescribes:

'close study and reading of works of literature, examples of which can be found on the reading list overleaf. Pupils need a good command of the English language to cope with the demands of writing detailed analyses of the texts studied in class. GCSE grade A or B in both English and English Literature is required. Students must also be prepared to read independently and produce well argued essays on selected works of poetry, prose and drama. 80% of the course culminates in examinations at the end of two years and 20% consists of

coursework. The syllabus will mean pupils have to study four different modules or components: Shakespeare [30%]: the study of two plays with essay and commentary questions; Texts for Close Reading and Analysis [30%]: two prescribed texts, from 16th century to contemporary and answer questions on the texts in an exam; General Literature [20%]: study four works of literature and answer questions on two in an exam, this may include works in translation; Coursework Project [20%]: choice between a long essay (3,000 words) or Creative/Critical Writing+ Oral Examination.'

2.

The University of London Examinations & Assessment Council (ULEAC 9170/9176) establishes the following assessment criteria for the folder: very good (34-40): genuine interest and first-hand, sensitive response. Close involvement. Well-organised. Coherent argument. Knowledge and full understanding. Felicitous personal style. Often concise. Evidence of critical insight. Consistent. Good (28-33): sound, competent, conscientious. Less sharply focused than above. Possibly diffuse and unnecessarily lengthy. Arguments well-organised with evidence of sound textual knowledge and understanding. Coherent, accurate style. Average (22 - 27): conscientious, solid work. Moments of sound insight but probably lacking in consistency. Capable of maintaining a clear line of argument supported by well-chosen textual illustration. Expression adequate and technically accurate. Low average (16-21): Textual knowledge often revealed in a general or sketchy manner (e.g. plot summary). Work may contain moments of insight, but comments are not developed or explored. Basic technical accuracy in style but limited range of vocabulary and tendency to use inappropriate register. Weak (8-15): Often thin in substance. Little to say. Usually dull with slim evidence of understanding or interest. Constant tendency simply to describe or narrate. Inconsistent. Slipshod personal style containing basic technical errors. Very Weak (0-7): Little evidence of interest or effort. Possibly some perceptive moments but not sustained. Derivative. Careless personal style, full of fundamental errors. Both content and expression inadequate.

ULEAC Assessment profile establishes the good, average and weak criteria considering relevance, content, structure and style. As good (7-10) relevance: full. Will note subtlety, complexities and possible disagreements where these are relevant. Will discuss. Average relevance (4-6) implies more relaxed application. Usually follows obvious line; may present a stock answer reasonably adapted for the purpose. Weak relevance (0-3) may ignore questions. Thin, inadequate, incomplete. The unadapted, prepared answer. Similarly, good content is full, relevant and incisive with sufficient and apt example, whereas average is moderately full, still relevant but perhaps implicitly so; less controlled and applied, and weak shows irrelevance; simplistic narration, summary or account. Incompleteness. A good structure is progressive, pertinently focused, convincing, well constructed; average implies that argument should be evident, but probably less controlled and purposeful. May plod a bit. Weak structure is confused, even non-existent A good style is clear, incisive, correct, even elegant, whereas average is ordinary, comprehensible, perhaps rather colourless, and weak style is slack, incorrect, possibly inappropriate.

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